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Volume 283, Number 12
May 2001

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One! Two!
He slew and slew
the profane ghoul. Alas! Alack!
Already dead,
and sans its head,
it kept on fighting back!

—Mark Zug

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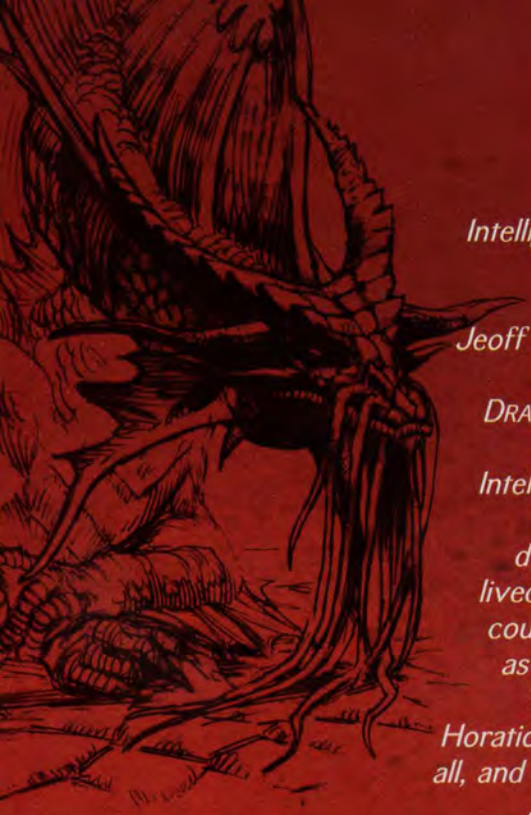

Thirteen. That was the combined Intelligence score of two of my favorite D&D characters.

Jeoff was a cleric of Heironious with an Intelligence of 6 played by former DRAGON Assistant Editor Jesse Decker, and Horatio was a paladin with an Intelligence of 7 played by yours truly. These two guys were just about as dumb as they come, but Jesse and I lived for the Thursday nights when we could use their low Intelligence scores as justification for getting the rest of the party into all sorts of mischief. Horatio's favorite word was "smite," after all, and it just wasn't a good day unless he and Jeoff found some evil to bash.

But there's a problem with playing the idiot week in and week out. How could we, as players, justify presenting logical and important ideas to the group when both of our characters were barely able to read? The answer lies in the strength of the cleric and paladin classes: Wisdom.

Jeoff began to rely on divine inspiration when Jesse had an idea he wanted to share. In fact, Jesse developed a routine in which he'd raise his hands, look at the ceiling for moment, then stop and preface his idea with, "Big Guy says . . ." before sharing the "wisdom of Heironious" with the rest of group.

Horatio, on the other hand, would just phrase his ideas aloud as questions. By directing them at the "the Big Guy," via Jeoff, my ideas were heard by the group at large. Horatio also developed a tendency to consult his faithful steed for advice, who was at least as intelligent as Jeoff and Horatio, and eventually smarter.

Basically, we found that playing to our weaknesses made them seem like less of a burden and more of a roleplaying hook. It was also useful to remember that a good number of important skills are Wisdom-based. Even if you're only getting 2 skill points or, ahem, 1 skill point per level, putting a few ranks in key skills like Listen, Diplomacy, or Intuit Direction occasionally helped our characters bail the party out of some tight spots. As James Wyatt points out in "Playing the Priestly Part" on page 48 of this issue, clerics (and paladins) can be approached in many ways to make them interesting, integral parts of an adventuring party. Finding your niche is often as easy as looking at those six key numbers you generated in the first steps of character creation.

How do your ability scores affect how you play your character? More importantly, how do your character's "statistical flaws" influence his or her personality? Lots of people have played the dumb, ugly fighter, but what about the clumsy druid or the weakling rogue? Do these characters have as much to offer as "well-rounded" adventurers? I think so, but then I'd like to think that there's a place in every group for a Jeoff or a Horatio.

Chris Thomasson • Associate Editor

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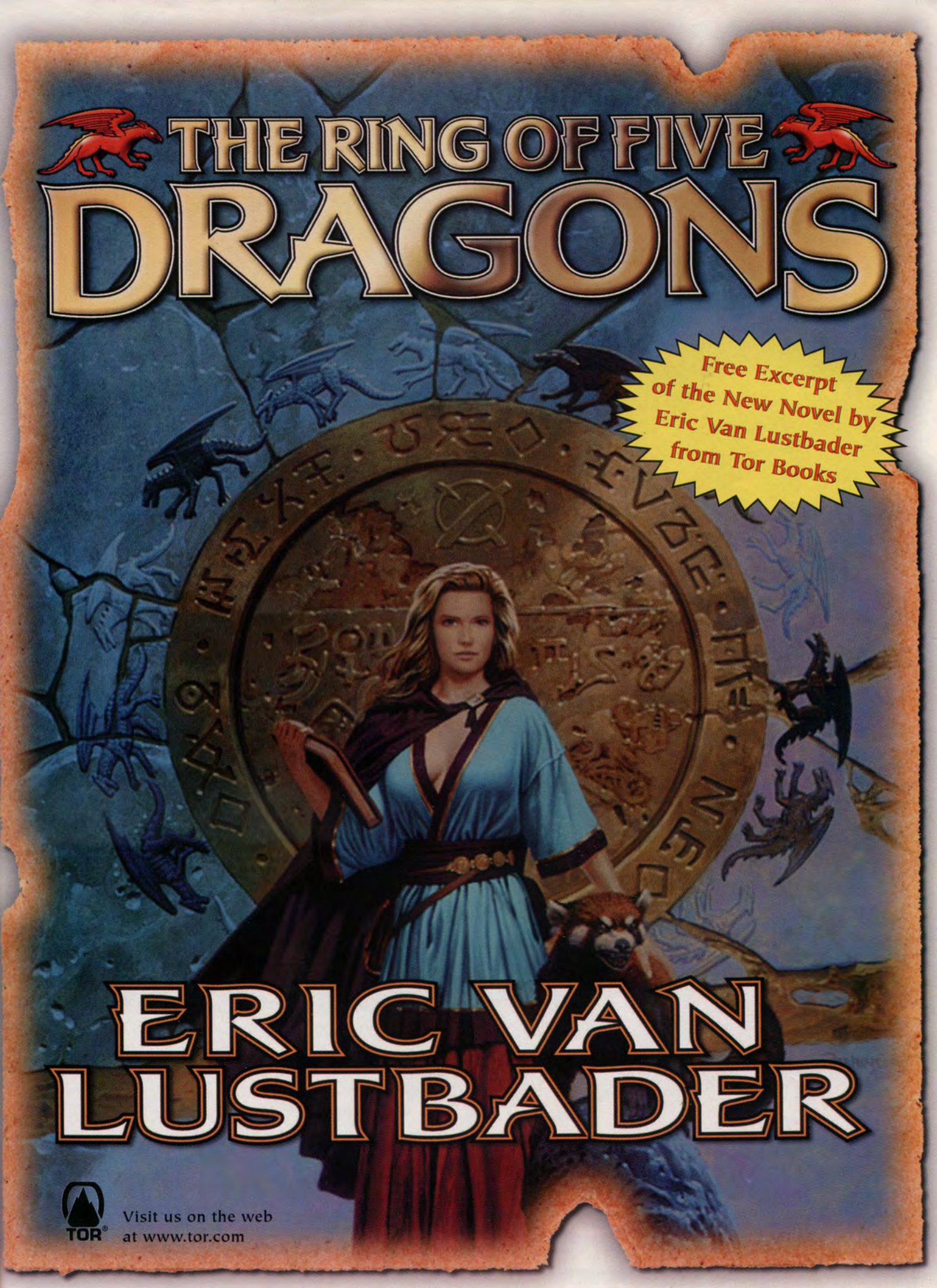
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He looked around. The setting sun caused shafts of light the color of pomegranates to penetrate the lower quarter of the skylights. They hung in the air like tapestries, burnishing the fluted ammonwood handrails, staining the swath of carpet that ran the length of the balcony, firing a thin sliver off the wall.

Curious, Annon padded down to the very end of the balcony. Sunlight dazzled a small strip of metal he had never noticed before. Here, the wall was not flat; the reflective metal jutted out perhaps a millimeter or two. He grasped it and pulled, almost ripping a nail clean off as his fingers slid off the slick surface. He got a better hold of the metal strip, applied a steady pressure and felt it move. A wedge of the wall swivelled silently out. A hidden doorway opened up, like the one Giyan and he had used to get to the living wing of the palace. Except this one was unknown to him. Sucking on his torn nail, he poked his head into the aperture.Velvet darkness engulfed the interior, but the odor of bitterroot was almost nauseating in its intensity. He took a deep breath of the fresher air on the balcony and stepped through into the darkness.

He stretched out his arms and encountered solid objects: walls. From this evidence, he deduced that he was in a narrow corridor. He moved forward cautiously, but still he tripped down the first three steps and only a desperate grasp at the thin, cold metal handrail saved him from plunging head-first into the abyss. The staircase spiraled down like the inside of a muodd shell. The pitch-black air was chill, acrid as silicon, laced as it was by the bitterroot smell.

He continued his descent until he came to a minuscule triangular landing. From here, the staircase branched off in three directions. He squatted down, felt around. The treads were of equal width; there was nothing to distinguish one from the other. Lacking a definitive clue as to which way to head, he chose the right branch. He could scent the bitterroot here and was congratulating himself on his luck when something made him stop dead in his tracks.

He felt something, though he could not say what. The skin of his tender parts prickled in warning.

A strange pulse had been set off inside himself. Somewhere, not far below him, something waited, something dark, vast, rippling. Terrifying. He stood very still, his hearts hammering in his chest.

He could not say why, but he knew he could not continue. The

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sense of danger was overwhelming. He began to back up, almost cried out as the back of his ankle struck the tread just above. He bit his lip. That strange pulse returned, stronger than ever. It was localized now beneath his ribs from the very spot where the gyreagle had embedded its talon in his flesh. It felt as if the talon were on fire, pulsing to a rhythm far faster than his own double-pulse.

He moved back up the stairs, careful to lift his feet high enough to reach the succession of ascending treads. All the while, his eyes frantically tried to part the heavy curtain of darkness.

Then he had regained the small landing. He was panting, sweat poured off him, but oddly his wound or, more accurately, the embedded gyreagle talon had ceased its frantic pulsing. Without thought, he plunged down the central staircase as fast as his legs would pump. A faint patch of dark grey seemed to wash the outer wall of the staircase, one moment real, the next seeming illusory.

Perhaps it was his haste that caused him to miss the last tread. He went over the edge, his hands grasped for the handrail that was not there and he found himself hurtling down a spiral chute. He tried to scream, but the sound stuck in his throat like a milk-nettle. The grey patch of light grew in volume and intensity until it filled the chute with a blinding glare. Then, all at once, Annon was spat from the chute. He fell through the air for a space of perhaps three meters, only to land on a dank and musty stone floor.

As he rubbed his aches and bruises, he sat up and took a look around. He was in what appeared to be one of several interlinked caverns hewn out of the bedrock below the palace. At regular intervals around the rough rock walls, he saw beautifully fluted metal holders for pitch torches. A few held the remnants of these torches, but none were lit. Nevertheless, light fell upon him from high above. He craned his neck and saw an enormous oculus a thick-paned window of an odd crystal in the shape of an eye which, Giyan had told him, had been made eons ago in a sorcerous fashion.

He scrambled up. Dead ahead of him was a cyclopean door, but one unlike any he had ever seen before. For one thing, it appeared to be made of solid rock. For another, it was perfectly round. In its center was a circular medallion with a wave motif into which was carved the mysterious figure of a dragon, just like the one upstairs he used to play with. He

remembered putting his hand into its carven mouth. This one was curled into a circle, its head facing outward, its jaws hinged open. He stared at this terrifying and beautiful creature, powerfully drawn to it in some way he could not understand. He put his hands out, feeling its surfaces, tracing the intricate patterns of Kundalan runes that covered it. He wished Giyan were here to translate for him. But perhaps she wouldn't. These looked like sorcerous symbols, similar to the ones in her cor-hide book, the one he had glanced through from time to time. Not that it had done him any good; he had no idea of the meaning of even a single rune. And yet he kept coming back to the book, sneaking peeks at it whenever he was certain that he would not get caught. His fingers kept following the engraved lines like a blind person learning to read.

All at once, the round door rolled back into a previously hidden niche. It happened so swiftly, so silently he had no time to react. The light the oculus let in did not extend beyond the door. It was as if the darkness beyond was aqueous, the air swirling with thick eddies that smelled of the sea. A stirring from within, something huge, grotesque, monstrous. He felt a pulsing beneath his ribs at the point where the talon was lodged, but it was of a wholly different nature than when he had felt it on the stairs above. The moment the pulsing began, the angle of the light penetrating the oculus seemed to shift, sending a shaft of pearly light through the doorway. Annon felt it strike the back of his head with a kind of heat. Then it had shot beyond him, illuminating the thing that stood just inside the open door.

Annon had a quick glimpse of a floor littered with bones, skulls, tatters of Kundalan clothing. Then his gaze was riveted on the creature. It was so alien, his brain could scarcely take it in: it appeared to be six-legged, with a long, tapering, reptilian skull, horns that whirled like waterspouts, huge, sinuous sea-green body, long coral talons, gleaming teeth of pearl that protruded out beyond the silhouette of its head. Its powerful uppermost appendages were attached along their upper surfaces to a thin veined membrane, triangular as a sail, moving like spindrift, gleaming prismatically. A long tail whipped back and forth like surf against a rocky shore.

These were brief but vivid impressions, taken in during the instant before one of the uppermost appendages reached out, grabbed him around the waist and drew him quickly over the threshold into the inner cavern. In the wink of an eye, the door rolled shut, they were engulfed in the darkness, and Annon lost consciousness.

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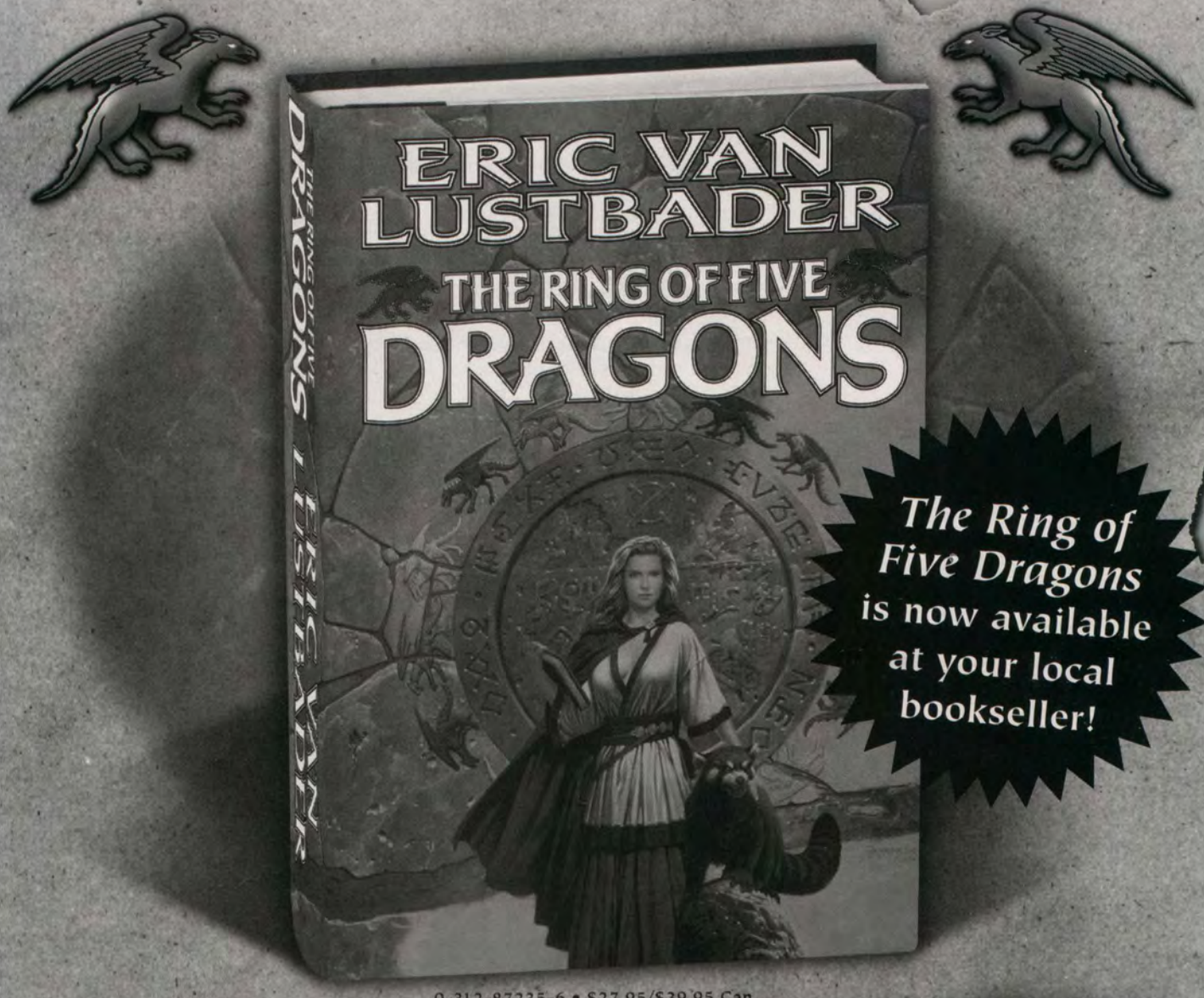

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Un-Forgotten Realms

In issue #279 Stephen Dunphy voiced his opinions regarding the content of the new *DRAGON*, and one of his few complaints was the FORGOTTEN REALMS content. From his statements, I got the impression that he believes every page devoted to such articles is so much wasted space. Well, I'd like to go on record as stating that I couldn't possibly disagree more. Though I am very impressed with the new *DRAGON* and its non-FORGOTTEN REALMS content, the reason I renewed my subscription last month is for articles like George Krashos's "Soargar's Legacy" in #277. From earlier issues, there are the works of Eric Boyd, Steven Schend, Thomas Costa, and others that I have probably neglected to mention here. All of these excellent contributors are big fans of the FORGOTTEN REALMS, and the quality of their work shows it.

Then there's Ed. I don't know how he does it, but I'm glad he does. His grocery list of contributions to your magazine needs no words from me to speak for their quality. It was Ed's "Into the FORGOTTEN REALMS" adventure published in *DRAGON* all of those years ago that brought the Realms to my attention, and every article of his since then has served to further my roleplaying experience as both player and DM.

That said, I will close by stating that if the FORGOTTEN REALMS were to become "forgotten" in the pages of *DRAGON*, you can be sure that my interest in your otherwise-excellent magazine would vanish like water into the sands of Anauroch.

Randel Clawson • Vienna, Austria

Fear not, faithful Faerûnians! (Sorry. We saw Stan Lee on television last night.) As the official D&D magazine, DRAGON devotes most of its pages to "core" articles that are useful regardless of the campaign you use. Since the FORGOTTEN REALMS remains the most popular D&D setting, it will continue to enjoy regular coverage in these pages. In fact, to celebrate the release of the new campaign setting next month, we'll launch not one but two new regular columns, one by the inimitable Mr. Greenwood.

Logjam Busters to the Rescue

[In Response to the final "Logjam Busters" problem in issue 281] As a member of a party interested in exploiting any advantage my comrades can drum up, I'd become immensely curious about her plan.

I would ask her how she plans to navigate her flying battering ram around corners, or up and down spiral staircases. If it's big enough to knock down a door, won't that make it too big to make a right turn in a 5-foot corridor? I'd ask whether she's willing to leave the device behind if we have to go somewhere it won't fit.

As far as riding it: Well, no offense to the wizard, but I'm not sure I'd trust the device not to roll while I sat on it, unless she could assure me she'd found a way to lick that problem.

If she proceeds despite these queries, I'd drop the issue; thus armed, the listening DM should be well prepared to grant the flying ram—and deal with it, assuming she hasn't thought of this stuff already, of course. (As I'm the DM in my group, this is my default position: Live by technicality, die by technicality.)

Graham Robert Scott • Alta Loma, CA

Graham's solution was one of many to arrive. Keep them coming, along with new problems as they crop up.

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Sorcerous Duel

Your recent issue dropped the ball! What's the big idea with making all sorcerers outcasts? I hate to add things like logic and reason into this, but why the heck would people with higher-than-average Charisma be likely to be outcasts?

I really think you guys should have come up with a little more innovative options. If you're going to devote a whole issue to sorcerers, then you should devote a little more time to coming up with something useful to say about them. I'm sorry I wasted the 6 bucks to pick up a bunch of useless info that doesn't help me with my character *at all!*

I really wish you'd do an issue about sorcerers where you aren't just ripping off old *X-Men* comics to come up with lame un-options for one of the coolest parts of 3rd Edition!

George Edward Green III
Address Withheld

After finishing reading issue #280, all I can say is *wow!* I knew that I had liked sorcerers before the issue came out, but upon reading the well researched, and organized articles that were presented, I thought who could not like this class? "Your Sorcerous Life" by Robin Laws, and "Magic in the Blood" by Geoffrey McVey were excellent, and I thought that it could really help the novice or the veteran player put down on paper what it is they are trying to accomplish with their character.

I could go on and on about how each article was better than the last, and that they were all very creative and informative, but that would take up too much space. Since your change in format with issue #274 and the introduction of the 3rd Edition, *DRAGON* is just getting better. I look forward to each one, and it brings me great joy, and pleasure to be able to spend some time reading such good stuff.

Scott Sloan • Vacaville, CA

Fool Wolf Fan

I have been an avid reader of *DRAGON* for many years, and I enjoy its many articles on everything from bedrolls to world-shattering artifacts. One thing that I have not read as much as I probably should is the fiction. These short stories have not always garnered my attention. However, one series has.

The stories of Fool Wolf have caught my eye. He always seems to be able to squirm out of every tight spot, and he is always fighting his own personal demon inside his "mansion of bone." I look forward to every issue in which a new Fool Wolf adventure is featured.

I would love it if a map of Fool Wolf's world could be included in a future issue, maybe even as a stand-alone campaign setting for D&D. I write about them because, after reading "The Opal of Nah" in issue #280, it sounds as if Fool Wolf is coming to the end of his travels. I am saddened by the prospect of not getting to enjoy further tales of his exploits. Please let me know if J. Gregory Keyes has any more in store for Fool Wolf. Let Mr. Keyes know he has my support for a compilation book of all of Fool Wolf's adventures.

Gary W. Hoff • Belmont, NC

Rest assured that Greg has more trouble planned for our favorite scoundrel. While you're waiting for more Fool Wolf stories, check out his novels from the same world: The Waterborn *and* Black God. *We also recommend his* Age of Unreason *series. A web search on Greg's name will turn up much more for fans of his work. By the time you've caught up on all that reading, we hope to have cajoled him into writing us another Fool Wolf story.*

Barbarians Band Together!

I have read the reviews and looked at the future releases. I am excited with the 3rd edition rules and enjoy playing with them, but when will I get a barbarian prestige class? The book for barbarians is set to be released so far out as to be nonexistent. Give us barbarian lovers a hand; give us a tidbit. I am begging of you.

I have played barbarians since *Unearthed Arcana* came out, and now I finally don't have to use a modified fighter. Currently I play a half-orc barbarian and I'm having great fun. Only one thing could make it a better experience: prestige.

Michael Thompson • Roy, Utah

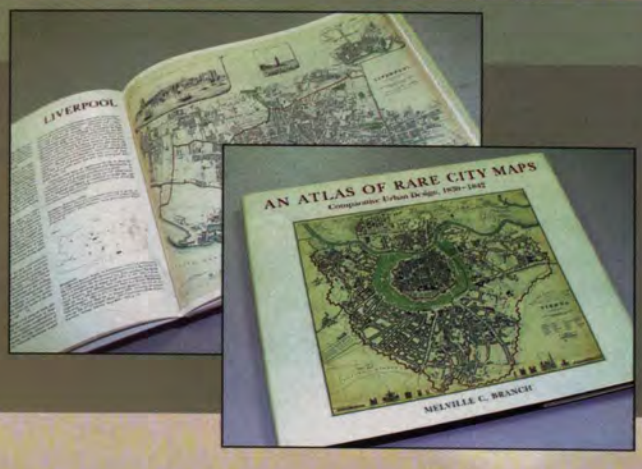
We hope you'll withhold your barbarian rage even though we don't have a barbarian issue on the schedule for this year. We know that's a long time for a barbarian to wait, so we'll put in a request to our regular prestige-class crafter for something to tide you over until 2002, when we'll have features for both barbarians and half-orcs.

Drow, Baby

I would like to be one of the first to second Elizabeth's request (issue # 280) to an all drow issue. I, like many others, have been a fan of the drow ever since the first novel of Drizzt. I would even like to see a complete campaign expansion dedicated to the drow history, culture, deities, cities, and so forth. There has always been plenty of information

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

If you love designing sprawling metropoli for your campaign worlds then you will undoubtedly find *An Atlas of Rare City Maps*, by Melville C. Branch, an invaluable resource. This large format book explores and compares the design of 40 of the world's largest cities. Exquisite turn-of-the-century, full-color engravings accompany the text so that the tome becomes as much about the beautiful artistic creations as their subjects. The high price tag ($90) might require a visit to a well-stocked library before a book store, but it's a gorgeous and useful resource for any gamer's collection.



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WHERE IMAGINATION KNOWS NO BOUNDS

on their surface cousins, I think it's time to give more attention to the drow. Of course, please give us plenty of info on the surface elves, but I would love more info on the all-mighty, all-(almost)-evil drow.

Orlando R. Joseph • Phoenix, Arizona

As long as we're taking requests, we'll put drow on the schedule for next year—not just for a few articles, but for a whole issue. If you have a great idea for a drow feature or familiar, now's the perfect time to send us an article proposal at ***dragon@wizards.com****.*

Back Issue Hunting

I have been able to find some back issues on the online auctions houses, and I was just curious why Wizards of the Coast do not offer sale of back issues any longer? I can understand not going back to the dawn of the *Dragon*, but what about 12-14 months? Just curious, and thank you very much for so much enjoyment.

Scott Sloan • Vacaville, CA

Stocking back issues is not a profitable venture for us, but many fine hobby retailers make it work by handling a variety of titles. Whether online or brick-and-mortar, those stores are the place to look for any issues you've missed.

It's All Greek to Us

While sent by my account, this e-mail contains a collective letter, expressing an opinion shared by 30 or more regular readers of *Dragon Magazine*. We are members of RPGHellas, an association of more than 150 Greek roleplayers. You may imagine our dismay when we discovered certain inaccuracies in "Heroes of the Persian War" by Michael Trice. In this article, the author attempts to describe in game terms the historical personalities involved in the wars between Greeks and the Persians, circa 430 B.C.

> I have said nothing about representing Xerxes as a 10th-level fighter while Leonidas, a warrior able to fend off thousands of men with only 300 of his own, is only 7th level.

Mr. Trice did a nice job in general terms. He recorded the historical facts quite well, considering that he had to present shortened versions of some of the most spectacular and heroic events in ancient history. Where he falls short is the languages entry.

Every character is recorded as a speaker of Common, Latin, and sometimes Turkish. This is where history goes down the drain. Let's start with Common. These are real-world heroes, and in their real world there was no such thing as a Common language.

Could it be that Mr. Trice means Greek by Common? If yes, why not clarify it? And then comes Latin, another widespread language of the ancient era—300 years after the Persian Wars! There is no such thing as Latin during the Persian War era. The same goes for Turkish. The Turks, as nomads, will arrive in the area about 1,000 years later.

I understand we are talking about game statistics, so I have said nothing about representing Xerxes as a 10th-level fighter while Leonidas, a warrior able to fend off thousands of men with only 300 of his own, is only 7th level.

These were real personas. Though they performed deeds that any fantasy writer would be hard pressed to imagine, they actually accomplished them, keeping Greece free and earning the admiration of generations to come. The principles of valor, pride, and defending one's home they exhibit are part of the Greek culture that influenced what we call western civilization. We appreciate the fact that you presented their deeds in *Dragon*. We are proud that readers worldwide will learn more of our history. Yet, let the information be whole and not misleading.

I will stress that the article was well written and we mean only to point out a small but important inaccuracy, not to rant. We certainly look forward to errata in a later issue. We also look forward to more articles like this one.

RPG Hellas
www.geocities.com/rpghellas

Yes, we presented Greek as "Common," but don't blame Mike for the errors—in the interest of filling out the characters' language slots, we asked for quick-and-dirty guesses in the interest of the rules, proving yet again that we're better gamers than historians. We're almost glad we were wrong since it got us a nice letter from our Greek fans. Beats finding a big wooden horse outside the office. D

Nodwick
THE GODS HAVE GIVEN ME A MESSAGE!
"THE END IS NEAR! PREPARE FOR—"
"A STATUE TO SQUISH YOU."
IT'S NICE TO SEE THE GODS WORKING ON A PERSONAL LEVEL.

by Aaron Williams

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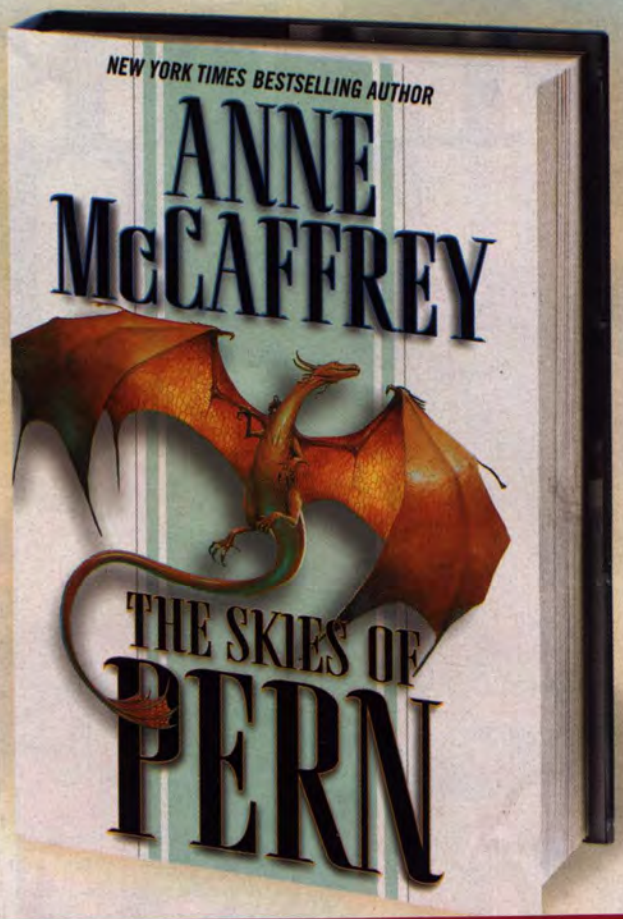

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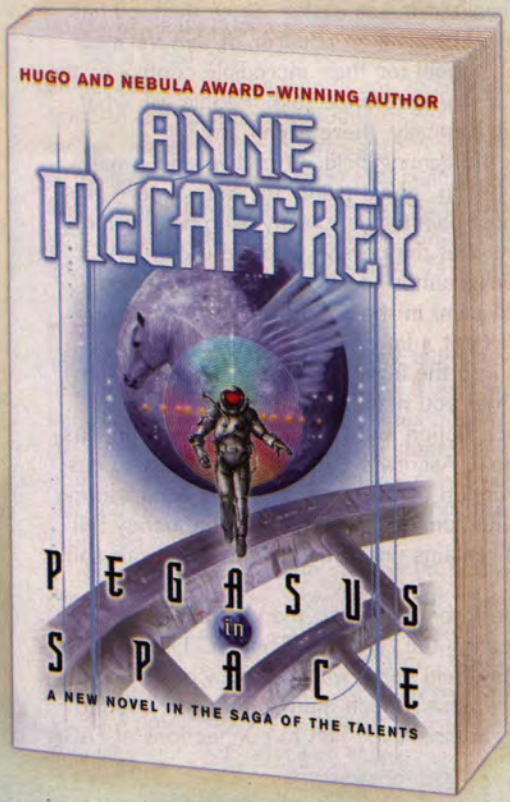

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MARK ZUG

PROFILES

by Michael G. Ryan

CONTEMPORARY MASTER

Mark's distinctive style combines impressionistic brushwork with defined contours. Many illustrators that appear in DRAGON happen to live locally. If I mention that there's a Mark Zug piece on the premises they always want to check it out. His work always induces "oohs" and "ahs."

-Peter Whitley
Art Director

Pennsylvania-native Mark Zug has painted some of the most memorable works of science-fiction and fantasy art in the field today—from book covers by author Tanith Lee, to trading cards to the cover of this very magazine. But it all began with Batman.

"From earliest memory I was drawing," Mark remembers, "and I positively sucked at it—until my first day of summer camp at age five. We were commanded to draw a drawing, and so I 'drawed a drawing': Batman flying over a caldera of boiling lava. Then I saw what the other kids were drawing. From that day forward, I was a lot easier on myself."

Zig-Zag Zug

In high school, Mark tried his hand at watercolors ("monsters in pastel shades and ink," he describes them), but the experience wasn't enough to move him from black-and-white drawings to color work. Still, the motivation was all around him: space paintings by Chelsea Bonestell, the album art of Roger and Martin Dean, the paperback covers of Frank Frazetta, and the Tolkien paintings of the Hildebrandts combined to convince him that if he wanted to make art his profession, color was the way to go.

"I started off in acrylic for its ease," he says, "but quickly switched to oil when I realized it was easier. Since then, oil has been the ultimate for me. I became an admirer of Jan Vermeer and others of the Dutch school for their incredible control of the medium. As one of my instructors once said: 'People ask what are the limitations of oil. Basically, there aren't any.'"

Mark didn't begin in the gaming field. After two-and-a-half years in art school, he left to "ghost paint" for the western illustrator Ken Laager. "'Ghost painting' is exactly like ghost writing," Mark explains. "It means that the person who did it didn't do it. I would paint western backgrounds—deserts, cliffs, pine forests, whatever—and he would paint in the important stuff like the heroes or heroines. But I got a lot of valuable tips, working processes, and insights into the business. One insight was: Don't take on so much work that you need a ghost painter!"

Mark's work in science fiction and fantasy began with an illustrated screenplay for Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot*, which segued easily into a comic-book version of the same story. "It occupied me for a couple of years," he admits, "but after '95 the money fell through, and the series remains unfinished to this day, with about 150 fully painted pages."

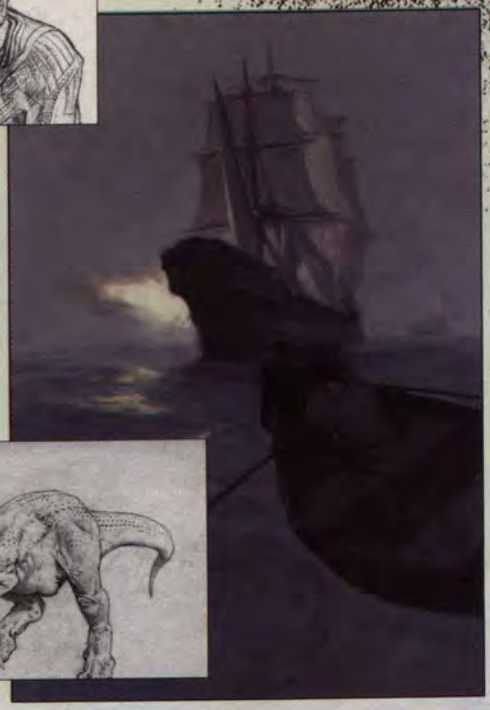
Next Mark moved on to book covers, then paintings for *Popular Science*, re-creating the Austrian "Iceman." His first major work in the fantasy field came with Last Unicorn's ***Dune*** card game. Though there wasn't much money in it, Mark found the work satisfying, and in time it led him to connections at FASA

The New Mark-et

In an age when digital illustration has become the latest rage, Mark Zug doesn't think that much has really changed.

"There are some fabulous workers in that medium," he readily admits. "And because it's data, there is more convergence potential to motion pictures than with paint."

Noting that while digital illustrations have supplanted oil and acrylics for matte paintings and the like, Mark points out that for still art, the digital "advantage" hasn't yet been determined . . . though, in the end, the creative drives behind it will always be the same. "Movies fly by at 30 frames a second, but we can linger over an illustration as long as we like," he points out. "The comfort and confidence of the hand that created it, no matter what the medium, is what energizes the viewer—so, as with painting, digital has to dovetail well with an artist's nature to produce significant art."



and Wizards of the Coast. His work for Wizards has been extremely popular, particularly his *Dragon* and **Magic: The Gathering** paintings. "My favorite is the orc paladin I did for *Dragon*'s cover last year (issue #275). It's a very simple idea based on a powerful feeling I have for an individual on an unremitting and apparently thankless quest," Mark says. "I also favor Jeweled Torque from the **Magic** series—it's still the only intense close-up I've been able to do. And finally, another of my favorites is an oldie—a self-promotion piece I did in the '90s featuring a Martian explorer happily holding up a bottle of water he has just succeeded in extracting from the ground. In a lot of ways, I still haven't surpassed it."

Artistic Zuggernaut

Mark's influences are diverse. He felt the "Pennsylvania influence"—artists like the Wyeths and Frank Frazetta—even before he knew they were from his neck of the woods. "I learned about N.C. Wyeth and Howard Pyle in art school," he remembers, "and immediately saw the well of inspiration where Frazetta and so many others drank. This body of knowledge and artistic priorities is known as the 'Brandywine School,' of which I'm a deep admirer." (Mark lives not far from the Brandywine River Art Museum, which houses most of N.C. Wyeth's paintings.) "Compositional simplicity, dramatic contrast, and believable humanity are the ultimate points of all its codices."

But it's not all old-school influence—Mark's contemporary influences are just as significant. In addition to the impressions of Jeff Jones, the nudes of Nelson Shanks, the "solidity" of James Gurney's drawings-in-paint, and the versatility of William Stout, Mark cites Phil Hale as a recent influence and a major revelation: "Like any genius, he makes it look so easy, brutal, and direct. And the rumor is that he works mostly from memory, which is my favorite method."

Hitting His Mark

During any given workday, Mark might have two or three new paintings underway at once. If he's working on a card set, though, most often he pursues one work at a time, while the next in is the drawing prep stages. "I like to use the morning to do the most intensely creative stuff and the very tail end of the day to do monkey-work like tracing drawings from the projector."

Some routines remain steady: an hour or so mixing up fresh paint each day, a 4- or 5-hour session of painting, a break, then another comparable session in the evening. "I do this six days a week," he estimates. "Usually stuff piles up so that one day is a non-art day. It takes me two to three weeks to do a cover-quality image, which, if I am to believe the stories of other illustrators, is slow."

What's the secret ingredient to finding one's personal artistic technique?

Practice! My techniques, which line up pretty closely with classical techniques and ordinary materials, were arrived at only by years of trial, error, and attrition. I've tried copal medium, Venice turpentine/stand oil mixtures, and different brand-name gels, and I find I always gravitate back to linseed oil/turpentine. Everyone will arrive at his or her own recipe. —Mark Zug

But one of his routines is perhaps the most important: his technique, the methods that make Mark Zug paintings unique. "I start off with a gessoed piece of thick watercolor paper, then apply a ground of oil paint, which may be white, tan, gray, greenish, or some sort of color fade. When that's dry, I trace the drawing onto it—very skeletally, usually—and do a classical monochromatic underpainting in earth colors or toned blacks. When that's dry, I apply finish colors to it wet into wet, which is to say, a single, moderately thick layer where adjacent colors are blended and fused together. I thin the paint where needed with linseed oil or turpentine, and add alkyd white to my oil white to help drying. When dry, I add a coat of damar retouch varnish, and I'm done. Baking comes into play only to accelerate the drying process between layers. And here's the secret about glazing: Everybody who paints in more than one layer does it. It only refers to a mark thin enough to let the underlayer show through. Impasto refers to a mark so thick that it not only hides what's underneath, it stands as its own texture, like rough plaster on a wall. I use both and every kind of brush stroke in between, here and there, as the execution demands."

His technique is something that Mark rarely, if ever, even thinks about. "It's like skating," he explains. "If you focus on what your feet are doing, you'll probably tumble. The most important thing is to follow your eyes."

MAY PREVIEWS

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Author Rich Redman agreed, "It's tempting to say everything is this book is totally cool, but my favorite thing about it is the way it conveys the passion these characters have for what they do. Today it can be hard for us to grasp religion as an integral part of everyday life, but that's what it is for these people. The tips on playing effective clerics and paladins, combined with the art, really get this idea across."

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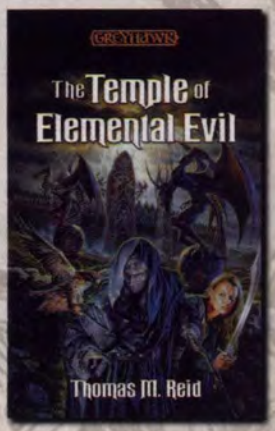

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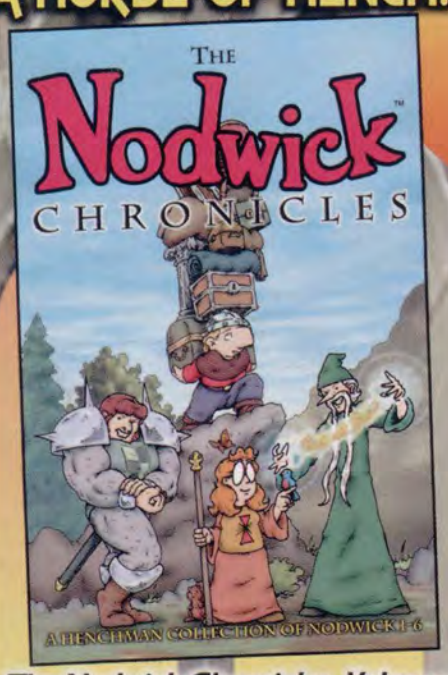

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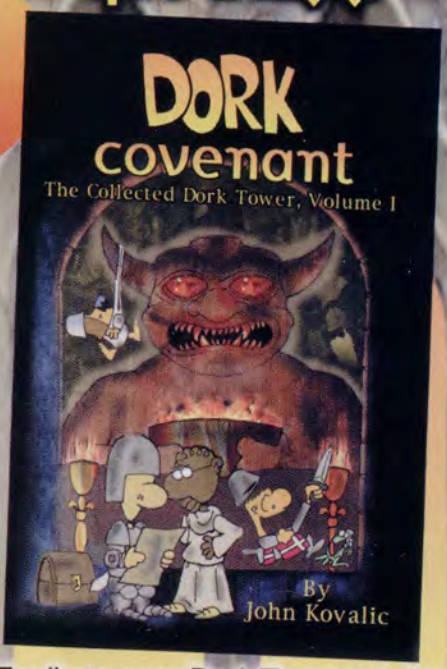

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countdown to the

FORGOTTEN REALMS

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conspiracy of CARTOGRAPHERS

THE MOST OBVIOUS change to the FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting is the facelift given to the lands of Faerûn. Creative Director Rich Baker wanted the new map to seem more realistic by reflecting the curvature of the planet Toril. When pressed, he confesses that a secondary goal was to make it all fit on one standard poster map.

To that end, Rich undertook the task of altering the face of the Realms. Some decisions were easy: Omitting Evermeet was a no-brainer, since including it meant including vast tracts of empty sea. Still, how does one begin to revise the face of a beloved fantasy setting?

We'll give you a hint: It involves scissors.

Rich Baker and Sean Reynolds look for where Faerûn could use a trim. The Shaar looks like a good candidate. Nothing but halflings there, anyway.

In this dramatic recreation of the Sundering of Faerûn, the boys slice the continent into diagonal strips. (Rich was a little more careful in the actual sundering.)

Finally, Rich calls in the professionals, and Rob Lazzaretti renders the final map in glorious detail. Faerûn is as good as new, and it looks more like something you'd find on a planet.

Taping back the strips forms a new version of the continent, almost but not quite the same as before.

Faerûn is put back together again with a couple of large, empty areas closed up. Using this patchwork as a model, Rich then redraws the map in crayon. (See the background.)

For more information on the new FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting, check out the Wizards of the Coast website: http://www.wizards.com/ForgottenRealms

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THE FINAL 4!

(RPG ELEMENTS)

by Gary Gygax

As mentioned last month, we're now going to address the concluding treatment of the final four elements that are integral to the roleplaying game. Although there are many additional "elements," those added by respondents as a 17th one, the meat of the factors comprising the game form is covered in the original 16. So, the last of the elements are:

Roleplaying (staying "in-character", and speaking thus when playing): What explanation is needed here? After all, the singular consideration for the uniqueness of roleplaying games is this very factor—coupled with role assumption, of course, as set forth in the previous column. It is quite surprising that the initial 200 respondents rated this element at a mere 6.6. When considered with all aspects of roleplaying games, though, it is understandable. Many participants see the game as more cerebral, or action-oriented, than as an exercise in acting and theater. With concentration of effort on assuming the character, the pretended persona need not be played at all times. From my experience, this element is difficult for most young participants.

Story (backstory and in play): The reason for what is about to happen, or is happening, is a paramount consideration in roleplaying games. One needs to understand, be moved so as to suspend disbelief, and actually "believe" through the medium of the story. Some reasonable backstory needs to be presented for this purpose, as well as some elements of the current and continuing tale about to be played out. While some participants place the most emphasis on the material leading up to the current time, and then depend on the DM to furnish the remainder, most participants want a more direct involvement of the players' characters in the shaping of events. They desire that their characters not merely perform but also interact meaningfully with the environment as their players direct so as to actually shape the story as well as have the capacity to affect its conclusion. In all cases, though, the element is generally recognized as a major one to the game form, so it has been rated at 7.6—the highest score for any of the critical portions of the game.

Strategy: Most roleplaying games give some space to this element, both on the individual level for developing characters and for the team of characters. Furthermore, most adventure modules have suggestions for the players in the latter regard. The DM must plan strategies for the campaign as a whole, NPCs performing therein, and directing the activities of PCs in the setting. Likewise, each player should have a character's strategy outlined and work cooperatively with her fellows so as to have a party-team strategy for success in each specific situation and for the long-term. This concept is a background one, not something played actively most of the time—save perhaps in critical confrontation situations. It thus rates a 6.6: important but not paramount in all aspects of play.

Theatrics (occasional histrionics and sound effects): Somehow I feel I failed to convey fully the concept of this element. Because we are dealing with roleplaying games, what is more natural than to dramatize very important situations? How better to convey danger, imminent peril, or even the ludicrous than through acting and sound? Every expert Dungeon Master uses theatrics when presenting something special to the player group. It is part and parcel of roleplaying games, I assert. Had I perhaps added graphical representations to the element's explanation, the recognition of the factor might well have been greater. In point of fact, illustrations of what threatens, as well as the strange scenes the characters find themselves in, are part of the theatrical performance attendant to the game. That aside, the average score for this element given by 200 respondents stands at a medial 5.1.

In closing this portion of the series, the readers' attention needs be directed to the fact that it is most likely that a great majority of respondents were thinking primarily of the fantasy-based roleplaying game when rating the elements. While this is valid in that most play is centered on the fantasy genre, there are many others. As I pointed out previously, non-fantasy roleplaying games are often strongly dependent on elements of the game form that are not so crucial to the fantasy genre.

In the next issue of *DRAGON Magazine,* we will take a quick look at the many suggestions put forth for inclusion of a 17th element of the game form. Most are simply observations of what makes the game enjoyable, or what the group playing it should be like. Some of the proposals might have weight, though. In that regard, your feedback is solicited, so please read and comment if you are so inclined.

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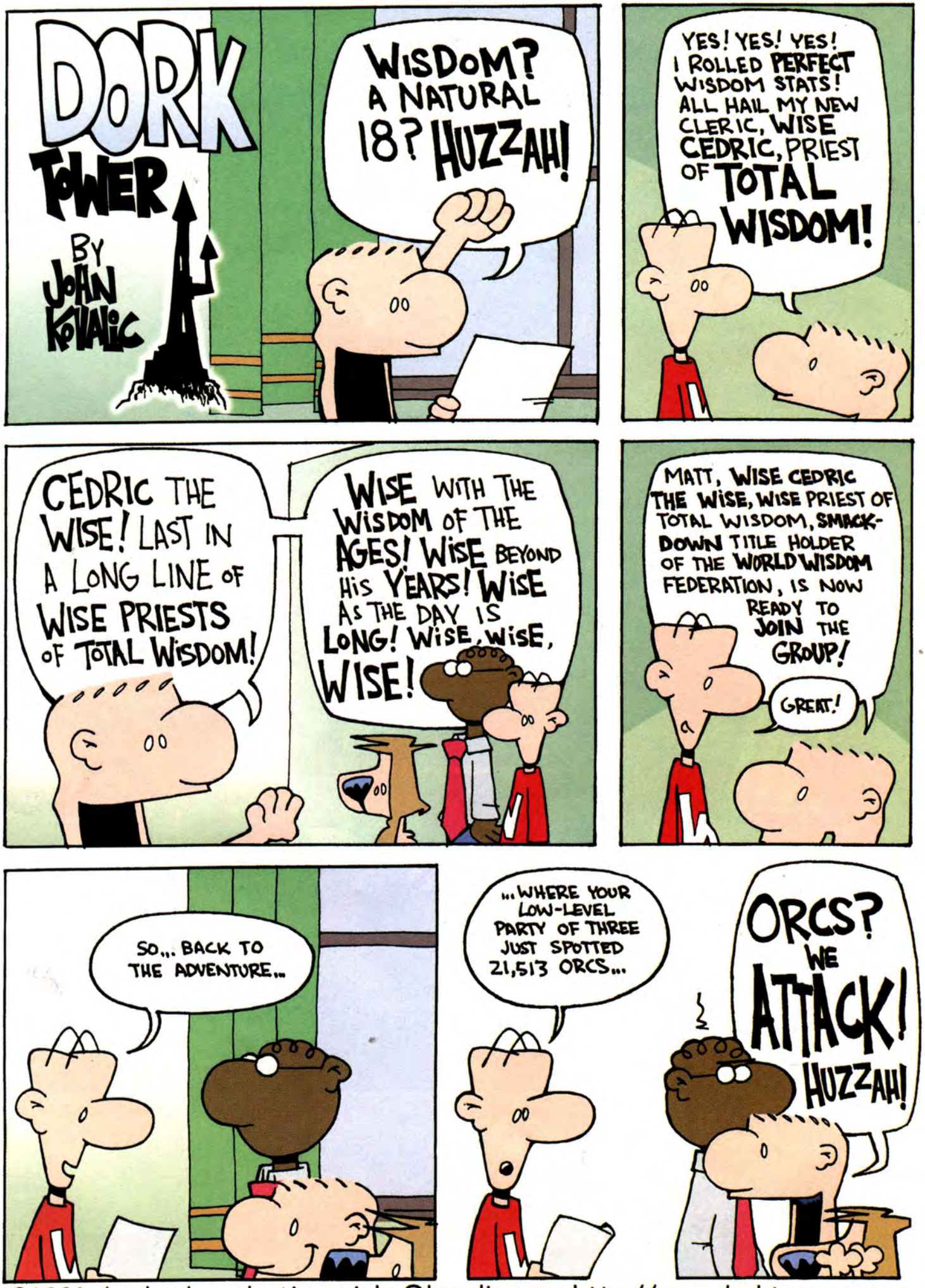
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DO-IT-YOURSELF DEITIES

A Guide to Creating Your Own D&D Pantheon

by Stephen Kenson
illustrated by Raven Mimura

Nothing is more important to a cleric than his deity. The object of a cleric's worship affects his alignment, spell choices, abilities, and outlook on life in general. The *Player's Handbook* provides a list of deities for clerics to serve, and settings like the Forgotten Realms have information about many gods and their worshipers. DMs creating their own campaigns, however, must consider what type of pantheon (or pantheons) exist and how they affect clerics in the campaign. This choice affects the overall tone and style of the campaign.

The Grand Design

Creating a pantheon begins with "the grand design," the overall goals the DM has for the pantheon and the niches it must fill in the campaign world. The grand design lays the foundations for the pantheon and should answer the following questions:

1. How many deities are there?
2. Are there deities of every alignment?
3. Are there deities for different races?
4. Do the deities' areas of influence overlap?
5. Is there a chief or ruling deity? Is there a divine hierarchy?
6. How much influence do deities have in the physical world?
7. How powerful are the gods? What are their limits?
8. How are the gods worshiped?

The answers to these questions determine the nature of the pantheon and its influence on the campaign world.

Diverse Deities

Most D&D campaigns assume that polytheism, the worship of many deities, is the norm. A number of deities allows for both diversity in clerics and conflict between different gods through their worshipers. Exactly how many deities exist is up to the DM. At least a dozen major gods seems to be the average to cover the various alignments and important portfolios, with other areas handled by lesser-known deities and the possibility of "forgotten" or foreign gods, or secret cults.

Of course, polytheism isn't the only option. DMs might wish to consider one of the following:

Monotheism is the existence of a single true god. Usually this god is all-knowing and all-powerful since he (or she) must cover all aspects of existence. Generally, monotheism isn't well suited to D&D campaigns simply because it requires all clerics to worship the same god. Of course, a monotheistic god might be multi-aspected (see below), having different sects and religions devoted to her, but this is largely the same as a polytheistic system, with the aspects of the one true god treated as separate entities.

Dualism divides the divine into two gods, usually polar opposites. In a D&D world this might be good vs. evil or law vs. chaos, depending on the emphasis of the campaign. Many

monotheistic religions that acknowledge the existence of a supernatural force opposed to the one true god can be considered dualistic. For example, Zoroastrianism acknowledges two deities: the good god Ahura Mazda, and the evil Ahriman. In some D&D settings, a third, neutral, option might exist. Like monotheism, dualism can be somewhat limited in terms of choices for clerics, but it does limit the number of religions, if that's what the DM prefers.

Multi-Aspected deities might have different "faces" or personae, each with a different religion devoted to it. For example, perhaps each god in the pantheon influences a particular area of life but has different aspects depending on alignment. Perhaps the god of fire is worshiped as a creative, inspiring force by good characters. Neutral characters see him as a helpful but potentially dangerous ally, while evil characters worship fire's destructive power. The existence of multi-aspected deities can cut down on the number of gods in a campaign but tends to multiply the number of religions, as each deity inspires several churches.

Pantheism acknowledges the presence of the divine in all things. Pantheistic deities are often not deities at all by D&D standards. The divine is everywhere and a part of everything, so clerics don't really have deities per se. They draw their power from their own faith and the spiritual energies of the world. There might still be religions in the campaign world (and people might worship various gods), but the power of clerics comes more from within than from any outside agency. Clerics in this type of setting might be devoted to abstract ideas or causes like good or chaos. This usually gives clerics greater freedom from religious hierarchies but can eliminate some of the flavor of having "real" deities. The druidic worship of nature described in the *Player's Handbook* can be seen as a kind of pantheism.

Animism is the belief that there are spirits everywhere in the world, ranging from the very minor (the spirit of an individual rock or blade of grass) to the very powerful (the spirit of the earth or the sun, for example). The most powerful spirits are like deities and might be worshiped as such, while the less powerful spirits might be servants of these deities and possibly allies of their clerics. Many divine spells might be the result of clerics and druids commanding lesser spirits to do things for them, like the spirits of plants causing them to move for an *entangle* spell, or air spirits creating *obscuring mist*. Animism like this is similar to polytheism, except for the presence of lots of spirits.

RELIGION IN ROLEPLAYING

Religion can be a sensitive topic, and DMs and players should keep in mind that this article (and D&D in general) deals with fantasy religions, even when talking about fantasy versions of real-world myths and beliefs. Players should be respectful of the religious beliefs of others, and DMs should be sensitive to any concerns players might have over the portrayal of religion in the game. So long as everyone remembers that it's just a game, there should be no problem.

Alignment

Are there gods of every alignment? Generally speaking, a D&D campaign should offer characters of every alignment a god to worship, if they so choose. Some of the types of pantheons described above favor gods of particular alignments. Polytheism provides for the possibility of gods for every alignment, which is the general assumption in the *Player's Handbook* and most D&D campaign settings.

There's also the question of what a particular deity's alignment should be. Sometimes it is clearly dictated by the deity's portfolio. A goddess of mercy and comfort is certainly good (and probably neutral if she gives her aid equally to everyone). A god of murder is definitely evil, and probably chaotic or neutral. At other times it's up to the DM to decide how society sees that god (or the god's portfolio).

Keep in mind that the worshiper's alignment doesn't have to match the deity's exactly, it can be "one step" away, allowing for worshipers to have diverse views, and possibly allowing for different sects worshiping the same deity. So a lawful good god might have worshipers that are lawful good, neutral good, and lawful neutral. A chaotic neutral god can have worshipers that are chaotic neutral, chaotic good, or chaotic evil, allowing for a very diverse range of views!

Generally speaking, deities with influence over things that can be either good or evil, such as fire, battle, magic, thievery, natural forces, and so forth, should be neutral, and either lawful, chaotic, or neutral depending on their nature. There are examples of this in the *Player's Handbook*. Wee Jas, goddess of death and magic (both truly neutral forces) is neutral and lawful, because magic follows its own laws in an orderly system. Olidammara, the god of thieves, is neutral, since thievery can be used to help or harm, and chaotic, since thieves defy the law by definition.

Racial Gods

Are there separate deities for the different races? This is the default assumption in the *Player's Handbook*; each race has its own patron deity, except for humans, who are too diverse to have a single patron. Of course, that doesn't have to be the case in your own campaign. Each race might have its own patron deity, or its own separate pantheon, or all intelligent races might worship the same pantheon. The last option can save time, since there's no need to create gods for every race, but it can take away some of the uniqueness of each race.

Even when different races worship the same deities, they might see them differently, and even call them by different names. The gods of the DRAGONLANCE setting are like this. There is a single pantheon, worshiped by all races, but each race has its own name and description for each deity. Humans call the chief god of good Paladine (and many other names). Elves call him E'li. Dwarves call him Thak the Hammer, while kender know him as Fizban the Fabulous.

You can also adopt the racial deities from the *Player's Handbook* and create a new human pantheon, or create all-new racial deities to go with a new human pantheon. Some racial deities can be part of the human pantheon as well; for example, Moradin makes a good forge-god to be worshiped by humans and dwarves alike, and Yondalla can be a hearth goddess that holds a special place in the hearts of halflings. Racial deities should follow the alignment tendencies of their race: elven

deities tend to be chaotic and good, while dwarven gods tend toward lawful good, and gods of humanoids like orcs and goblins tend to be evil.

Portfolios

Each deity has her own area of influence, known as a "portfolio." It describes the things the god controls or embodies. Often a deity's portfolio includes other things related to their primary sphere of influence. For example, Kord is a god of physical contests and, to some degree, battle. Pelor is seen as a god of healing, related to the sun's life-giving light, and an enemy of undead, evil creatures that fear the light. Some slight degree of overlap in a pantheon's portfolios is useful because it allows gods of different alignments to serve different functions, and creates a measure of tension between the gods over who controls what (allowing for conflict between their worshipers as well).

The major gods of a campaign tend to have dominion over things of the greatest concern to society, such as agriculture, death, life (and health), magic, nature, rulership, the sun and the moon, the weather, and so forth. More specialized gods control areas like justice, thievery, travel, crafts, and so on. You can use the portfolios of the deities from the *Player's Handbook* as examples, as well as the sample pantheons in this article.

Divine Hierarchy vs. Divine Anarchy

How the pantheon is arranged and how the gods interact with each other is an important consideration. Some pantheons have a chief deity or pair of deities ruling over all of the others. This divine ruler might face dissent and occasionally defiance but usually rules unopposed. This might result in the churches of other deities being subordinate to the church of the ruling god or gods.

A more complex arrangement is to divide the pantheon into factions, each led by a particular god. This is the case with the DRAGONLANCE deities. They are divided into three camps according to alignment: good, neutral, and evil. Paladine rules over the gods of good, while Takhisis rules over the gods of evil. The neutral gods acknowledge Gilean as the wisest among them, but otherwise have no ruler. This is a good arrangement for campaigns where factions of gods are directly opposed to each other.

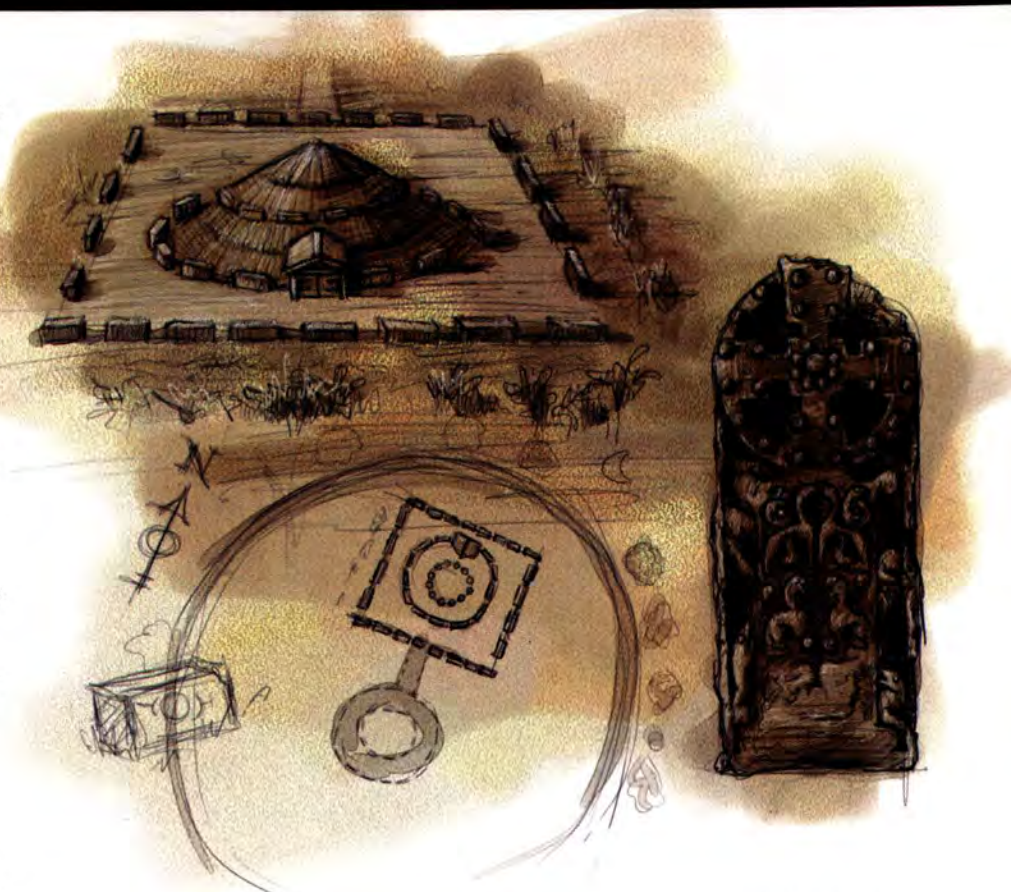
Most D&D campaigns, like the FORGOTTEN REALMS, have different factions and alliances within the pantheon, but no deity who rules over the entire pantheon (or there's an absentee ruler that has little or nothing to do with the

THE GREEK PANTHEON

Deity	Align.	Domains	Typical Worshipers
Aphrodite, Goddess of Love	CG	Good, Luck, Protection, Trickery	Lovers, rogues, bards
Apollo, God of the Sun	CG	Good, Healing, Knowledge, Sun	Bards, rangers, archers, seers, musicians
Ares, God of War	CN	Chaos, Destruction, Strength, War	Fighters, soldiers
Artemis, Goddess of the Moon	N	Animal, Luck, Protection, Trickery	Women, rangers, hunters
Athena, Goddess of Wisdom	LG	Good, Knowledge, Law, War	Paladins, loremasters, scholars, nobles
Demeter, Goddess of Nature	N	Animal, Earth, Plant, Protection	Farmers, druids, rural folk
Dionysus, God of Wine	CN	Animal, Chaos, Luck, Trickery	Barbarians, bards, wild folk
Hades, God of the Underworld	NE	Death, Destruction, Earth, Magic	Necromancers
Hecate, Goddess of Magic	LE	Knowledge, Magic, Travel, Trickery	Sorcerers
Hephaestus, God of Blacksmiths	N	Earth, Fire, Protection, Strength	Smiths and artisans
Hera, Queen of the Gods	N	Healing, Luck, Protection, Strength	Women (particularly wives and nobles)
Hermes, God of Messengers	N	Luck, Magic, Travel, Trickery	Rogues, travelers, merchants
Hestia, Goddess of the Hearth	NG	Good, Healing, Luck, Protection	Common folk, midwives
Poseidon, God of the Sea	CN	Chaos, Magic, Trickery, Water	Sailors, horsemen
Zeus, King of the Gods, God of Thunder	CG	Air, Destruction, Good, Strength	Fighters, soldiers, nobles

rest of the world). So a group of nature gods might join together as allies (and expect their churches to do the same), while gods of destruction or evil might form an alliance against their enemies. In the FORGOTTEN REALMS, Talos (god of destruction) is served by Auril (goddess of cold), Malar (god of bloodlust), and Umberlee (goddess of the oceans). They are known collectively as "The Gods of Fury." Likewise, Oghma (god of knowledge) is served by Gond (god of smiths and inventors), Milil (god of poetry and eloquence), and Deneir (god of literature and art). The worshipers of these gods likewise often work together.

Finally, the DM might decide that none of the gods interact with any others, except through their worshipers. Their churches might still establish alliances or enemies among other religions, but the gods themselves remain aloof.



Godly Might

How powerful are the gods? Godly power can range from omnipotence to slightly greater than high-level characters. As a general rule, D&D gods tend to be limited in their power simply because there are so many of them. It's more interesting if the gods can't do everything.

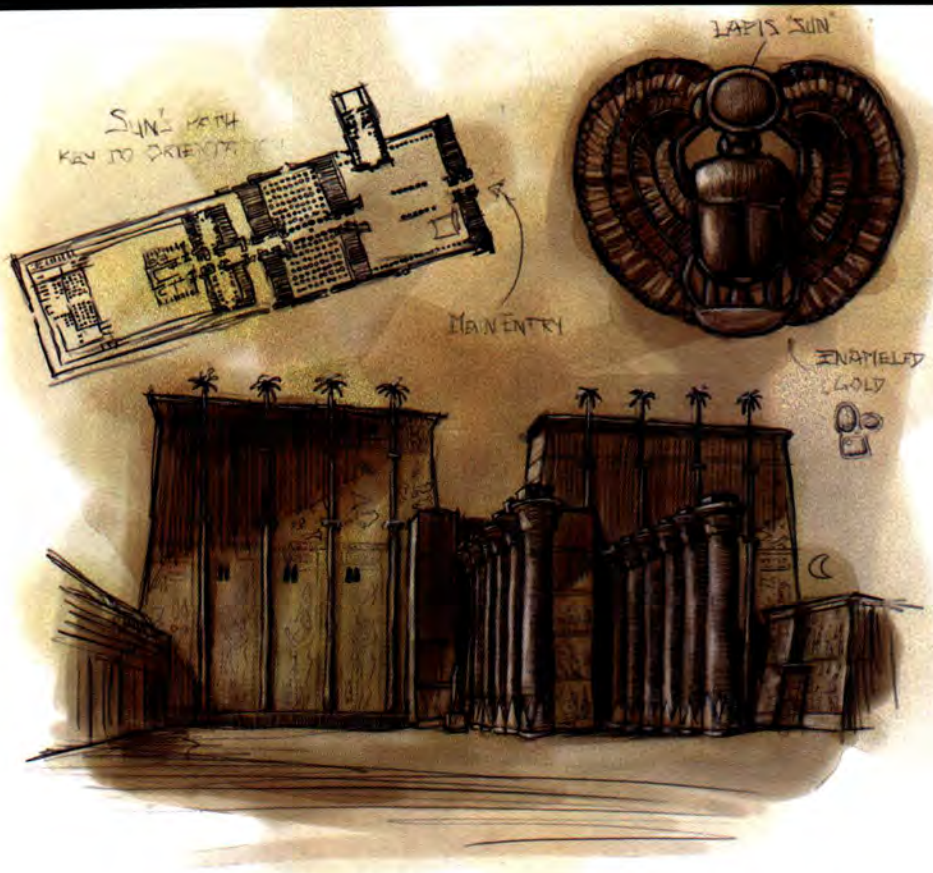
The power of a god is often in direct proportion to the number of worshipers he has, in which case it is in his best interest to spread the faith among as many mortals as possible. Clerics are encouraged to preach and convert, and evil clerics might convert by the sword, forcing conquered people to worship their deity and add to its power. Good clerics might preach, but most good deities want only sincere worship, not forced conversions. Tying the power of the gods to worship gives them more reason to take interest in the physical world.

Regardless of their actual power, deities are usually limited in their ability to directly intervene in the physical world, either by agreement or divine law. Rather than further their own causes and oppose each other openly, they work through their mortal worshipers, particularly their clerics. Their power might be limited to granting divine spells to clerics, using them as their proxies and advocates in the world of mortals.

In some cases, gods might have the ability to create avatars, mortal manifestations of themselves, or they might have especially favored mortal servants, often called the "chosen" of the god. Both types of characters are suited to high-level campaigns. An avatar or chosen of a god also makes a useful NPC advisor, ally, or enemy for a campaign. For example, the befuddled wizard Fizban from the DRAGONLANCE saga is actually an avatar of Paladine, who helped guide the Heroes of the Lance. The sage Elminster from the FORGOTTEN REALMS is one of the Chosen of Mystra, the goddess of magic.

THE CELTIC PANTHEON

Deity	Align.	Domains	Typical Worshipers
Arawn, God of the Dead	LE	Death, Evil, Magic	Necromancers
Brigit, Goddess of Fire and Poetry	CG	Chaos, Fire, Knowledge	Bards
Balor, King of the Fomor	LE	Destruction, Evil, Law	Tyrants, giants
Cairbre, God of Music	CG	Chaos, Knowledge, Luck	Bards
Dagda, The Good God	NG	Good, Protection, Strength	Nobles
Danu, The Mother Goddess	NG	Good, Healing, Magic	Druids, sorcerers
Dianchet, God of Healing	NG	Good, Healing, Protection	Physicians
Goibniu, God of Smithwork	N	Magic, Protection, Strength	Smiths
Lugh of the Long Arm	NG	Knowledge, Luck, Magic, Sun	Fighters, bards
Mannanan Mac Lir, God of the Sea	CG	Air, Magic, Water, Trickery	Sailors
The Morrigan, Goddess of War	CN	Chaos, Destruction, War	Fighters
Nuada of the Silver Arm	LG	Good, Law, War	Fighters
Oghma, God of Knowledge	N	Knowledge, Luck, Magic, Trickery	Bards



Worship

Once you've got the ranks of the pantheon filled out and understand their roles in the world, consider how the gods are worshiped.

Religious Hierarchy

Are there hierarchical religions devoted to each individual deity, or do some deities prefer a looser structure, with equality among their priests? Generally, most religions have some sort of power structure, usually based on level, although character level doesn't always reflect a level of influence within the hierarchy. Thus, the head of a religion is typically its highest-level cleric (or druid), but also the one with the best Charisma, Diplomacy skill, and political connections.

In some cases, truly high-level clerics and druids might be outside the church's power structure altogether (this is particularly common for druids), serving their deity's interests more directly in the world.

A religious hierarchy has an effect on adventuring priests. Are cleric and druid characters beholden to their religious superiors? Do they have to report on their activities to anyone? When they come into a town or city, should they put in an appearance at the local temple (church, grove, or something similar), and are they required to obey the orders of the head of that temple? If so, this can be a useful adventure hook.

Clerics vs. Druids

Does a deity support clerics, druids, or both? Generally, most deities have clerics. Druids either worship nature itself, or revere gods of nature. It's up to the DM whether or not druids can serve a particular god in the campaign, but keep in mind that a worshiper's alignment should be within one step of the god's, and druid's must have some element of neutrality in their alignment.

Sects

The ability of worshipers to differ slightly in alignment from their deity allows for the existence of different sects worshiping the same god. A sect is a religious division based on belief or practice; it might share a great deal in common with other sects, or it might differ from them greatly, depending on alignment. For example, Olidammara, the god of thieves, is chaotic neutral. He might be worshiped by a chaotic good sect that believes in stealing from the evil and oppressive in order to weaken them and give aid to their victims. His chaotic neutral worshipers might have no organized sect at all, doing as they please, while his chaotic evil worshipers might maintain a loose alliance of thieves and assassins dedicated to advancing their own greed in the god's name.

THE EGYPTIAN PANTHEON

Deity	Align.	Domains	Typical Worshipers
Ra, God of the Sun	NG	Good, Knowledge, Protection, Sun	Rulers, scholars, nobles
Anubis, God of the Dead	LG	Death, Law, Luck, Protection	Guardians, embalmers
Apep, Serpent of Chaos	CE	Chaos, Death, Destruction, Evil	Evil cults
Bast, Goddess of Cats	CG	Animals, Chaos, Luck, Trickery	Nobles, women
Bes, God of Luck	N	Luck, Protection, Travel, Trickery	Dwarves, gamblers, rogues
Geb, God of the Earth	N	Earth, Plant, Protection, Strength	Farmers
Horus, God of Vengeance	LN	Destruction, Law, Sun, War	Soldiers, nobles, revenge-seekers
Isis, Goddess of Magic	NG	Good, Healing, Magic, Water	Women, sorcerers, wizards
Nephthys, Goddess of Wealth	CG	Chaos, Good, Knowledge, Protection	Merchants
Osiris, God of the Underworld	LG	Death, Good, Law, Plant	Nobles, embalmers, farmers
Seker, God of Light	NG	Good, Protection, Strength, Sun	Commoners
Set, God of Evil	LE	Destruction, Evil, Law, Trickery	Tyrants, evil cults
Shu, God of the Sky	LG	Air, Good, Law, Sun	Astrologers, mystics, nobles
Thoth, God of Knowledge	N	Knowledge, Luck, Magic, Travel	Scholars, loremasters, wizards

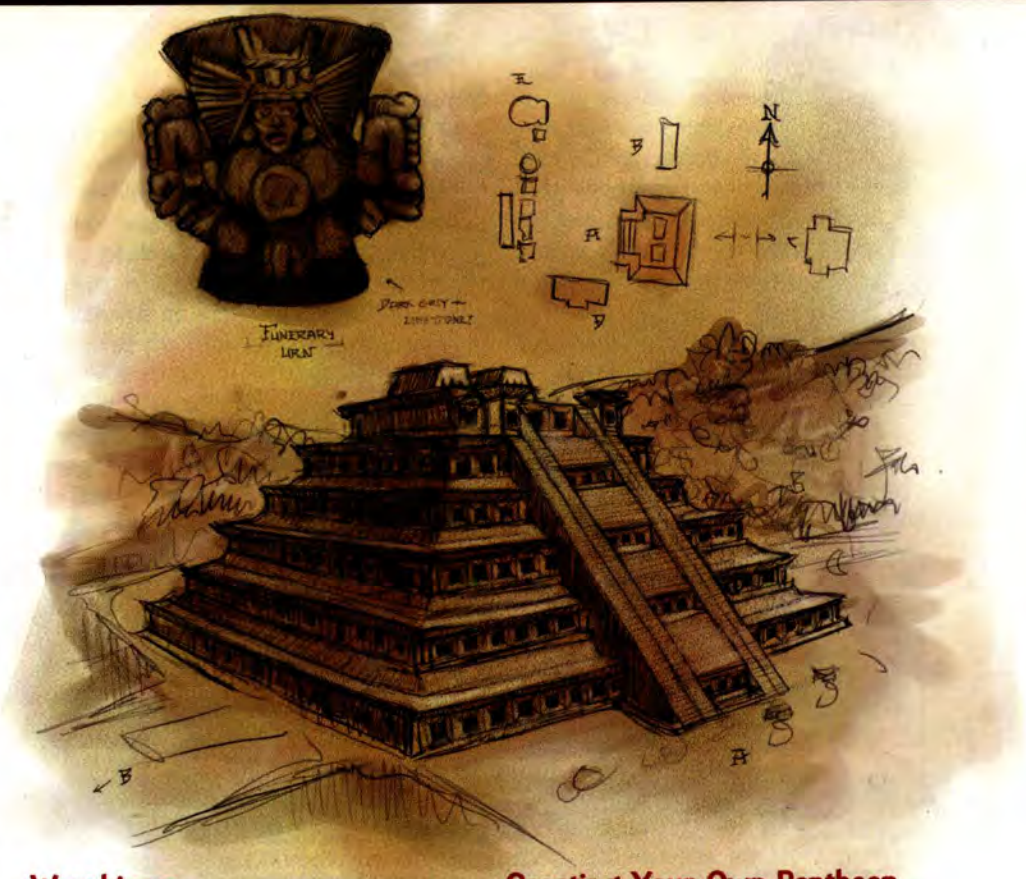
It's said that no one fights as fiercely as family, and conflict between different sects can be fierce indeed. Conversely, a deity's sects might cooperate toward a common purpose, such as the good and neutral sects of a deity banding together to limit the influence of an evil one.

Domains

Consider what domains of spells the deity grants access to. Most deities have three or four domains for their clerics to choose from, tied to their portfolio. A storm god might grant access to the Air, Destruction, and Water, domains, for example. Domains are also influenced by alignment. A deity strongly associated with good, evil, law, or chaos, probably grants access to the representative domain as well. Choice of domains among the deity's clerics might be influenced by sect, with particular sects preferring particular domains.

You can also create domains to suit the deities in your campaign. The *Player's Handbook* provides twenty-two domains, and other D&D books provide additional domains. Creating a domain is as simple as creating a list of nine domain spells appropriate to the domain and choosing a granted power to go with it. Often the granted power is the ability to cast spells tied to the domain at +1 caster level, but it might also be a supernatural enhancement bonus, the power to rebuke or command creatures other than undead, or access to a feat or unique power.

Look at the existing domains carefully before creating new ones, and use them as guidelines and examples.



Worshipers

Last, consider who worships the deity? Deities are worshiped not only by clerics or druids but also by characters of other classes and common folk in the campaign. Often a god's worships are obvious; fighters favor gods of war and strength, rogues favor gods of cunning and trickery, and so forth. Gods of goodness and elements of everyday life (like farming, home, healing, and the cycles of nature) tend to be more popular with commoners.

The worship of evil deities might take place openly in evil or neutral societies, but is otherwise likely to be secret. The same is true of evil sects devoted to neutral deities.

Creating Your Own Pantheon

By following the guidelines given above, you can build your own pantheon of deities. One of the best guidelines for helping build a pantheon is using elements of existing pantheons, either from D&D books or by perusing the mythology section of your local library or bookstore. Sometimes it's as easy as taking an existing god and changing her name, appearance, or alignment slightly to create one more suited to your game.

Provided for reference are six mythological pantheons: Aztec, Celtic, Chinese, Greek, Norse, and Egyptian. You can use any one of them in its entirely, if it suits the feel of your campaign, or you can modify or mix-and-match to your satisfaction.

THE AZTEC PANTHEON

Deity	Align.	Domains	Typical Worshipers
Quetzalcoatl, God of the Air	LN	Air, Law, Magic, Travel	Nobles
Camatli, God of Fate	N	Luck, Protection, Trickery	Fortune-seekers
Camazotz, the Bat God	CE	Chaos, Evil, Travel	Assassins
Chalchiuhtlicue, Goddess of Water and Love	CG	Luck, Protection, Water	Lovers
Huhueteotl, God of Fire	CE	Chaos, Destruction, Fire	Evil clerics and wizards
Huitzilopochtli, God of War	N	Destruction, Strength, War	Fighters
Itzamna, God of Medicine	NG	Healing, Magic, Protection	Physicians
Micatlantecuhtli, God of Death	LE	Death, Evil, Law	Necromancers
Tezcatlipoca, God of the Sun	CE	Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Sun	Nobles
Tlaloc, God of Rain	LE	Evil, Trickery, Water	All who need rain
Tlazolteotl, Goddess of Vice	CE	Chaos, Evil, Trickery	Rogues
Xochipilli, God of Luck	N	Knowledge, Luck, Trickery	Gamblers, rogues

In the Beginning...

Let's look at the creation of a pantheon from scratch:

We'll create a pantheon that suits the basic D&D style; a polytheistic one with a dozen or so major gods. All intelligent creatures worship the same pantheon of gods, although some races call their gods by different names. We'll use the racial gods mentioned in the *Player's Handbook*, but they'll be worshiped by humans as well as their own races. There's no central authority among the gods, since that cuts down on conflict. Instead, the gods sometimes form alliances with like-minded deities, and their worshipers follow suit. Let's start with the racial gods, modifying them a bit to fit into a larger pantheon.

Moradin is god of the dwarves, but he's also the god of the forge and blacksmithing in our pantheon. Metalworkers and smiths of all races revere him, but the dwarves believe Moradin specifically created them on his forge and gave them life.

Yondalla, goddess of the halflings, is already associated with hearth, home, and protection, so she takes those under her portfolio. She's a very popular goddess among common people, honored and called upon for blessing hearth and home.

Garl Glittergold is the god of the gnomes, but he's also the god of trickery, illusion, humor, and cleverness. He's worshiped by bards and some sorcerers, as well as gnomes, and he's the patron of artists and performers.

Corellon Larethian is god of the elves, and he's also god of the forest and patron of rangers and druids.

Finally, Gruumsh, god of the orcs, is well suited to also become the god of slaughter, senseless warfare, and violence, worshiped by all people who delight in bloodshed.

Now we need some other gods to round out our list. Looking at the portfolios, we can use deities of the sun and moon, the sea, magic, thievery, nature (in general, as opposed to Corellon's woodlands), death, the sky or weather, and love. We can also use some more goddesses to balance out the preponderance of gods we have so far.

Apollo and Artemis balance each other well as deities of the sun and the moon. But let's call them Solis and Argena, and make them husband and wife, rather than brother and sister. Solis is lawful good while Argena is chaotic good, and myths about them relate how they pursue each other across the sky, but never quite end up in the same place. Days when both the sun and moon are visible are considered auspicious.

Isis or Hecate would make an excellent goddess of magic, but rather than making her good or evil, let's make her neutral, like Boccob, and call her Intara, patroness of wizards and sorcerers of all alignments.

THE CHINESE PANTHEON

Deity	Align.	Domains	Typical Worshipers
Shang-Ti, God of the Heavens	LN	Air, Law, Plants, Sun	Nobles, bureaucrats, farmers
Chih-Chiang Fyu-Ya, God of Archers	LE	Travel, Trickery, War	Archers, evil fighters
Chih Sung-Tzu, Lord of Rain	N	Air, Travel, Water	Commoners
Chung Kuei, God of Truth and Testing	LG	Knowledge, Law, Luck	Monks, commoners
Fei Lien & Feng Po, Counts of the Wind	NG	Air, Good, Protection	Fighters, travelers, commoners
Huan-Ti, God of War	CG	Strength, Protection, War	Fighters
Kuan Yin, Goddess of Mercy	LG	Good, Healing, Protection	Healers, midwives, mothers
Lei Kung, Duke of Thunder	LE	Air, Destruction, Strength	Sailors and those seeking to avoid his wrath
Lu Yueh, God of Epidemics	CE	Chaos, Destruction, Evil	Those avoiding his wrath
No Cha, God of Thieves	NE	Knowledge, Luck, Trickery	Thieves and brigands
Shan Hai Ching, God of Wind and Sea	LN	Air, Luck, Water	Sailors and all who depend on the sea
Tou Mu, Goddess of the Northern Star	CE	Chaos, Evil, Destruction, Fire	Evil humanoids of all kinds
Wen Chung, Minister of Thunder	CN	Air, Chaos, Travel	Commoners
Yen-Wang-Yeh, God of the Dead	N	Death, Knowledge, Magic	Necromancers, commoners

Likewise, making our nature deity a goddess makes sense (to balance the masculine Corellon), and let's make this goddess Coreth neutral as well, so she can have both clerics and druids serving her.

For a death deity, we'll choose another goddess, one associated with the underworld and the opposite of Yondalla in many ways (with Coreth balanced between them). Hel from the Norse pantheon fits the bill, but let's rename her Uria and describe her as either a beautiful woman or a lich-like corpse.

That gives us a chaotic evil and neutral evil deity. It's time for a lawful evil god. Set, Surtur, and Hecate fit, as does Hextor from the *Player's Handbook*. So how about Hishrak, an evil god with the head of a cobra, worshiped by tyrants and evil spellcasters?

For thievery and the sea let's look to more neutral gods. The Greek god Hermes is good for thievery. By expanding his portfolio to make him the god of wealth and profit, he becomes a truly neutral force. Changing his name to Aos, let's make him the patron of merchants as well as thieves and con men. For the sea, a god like Poseidon works just fine and chaotic neutral is the perfect alignment. We'll call him Romas and keep much of Poseidon's image, including his trademark trident.

That gives us thirteen deities, eight gods and five goddesses. We've also got at least one god of each of the nine alignments, except for lawful neutral. To round things out, let's add two more goddesses. The first is the goddess of love, modeled on Aphrodite, but called Amora. The other is Neleva, the lawful neutral goddess of retribution. She embodies both righteous retribution (and in that capacity is worshiped by many paladins), impartial justice, and vengeance (creating an underground sect of evil worshipers, which Neleva's paladins hate more than anyone else).

That gives us a pantheon of fifteen deities. All that's left is for us to choose domains and write them up for our campaign. The table below provides an idea of how the final pantheon might look.

Creating your own set of deities can be just as easy. With a little bit of research and time, your do-it-yourself pantheon can stand up there with the best of them!

THE NORSE PANTHEON

Deity	Align.	Domains	Typical Worshipers
Odin, the All-Father	NG	Knowledge, Magic, Travel, Trickery	Barbarians, soldiers, warriors, nobles
Balder, God of Light	NG	Good, Luck, Protection, Sun	Farmers
Bragi, God of Poetry	NG	Knowledge, Luck, Travel, Trickery	Bards, musicians, poets, artists
Frey, God of Elves	NG	Good, Magic, Protection, Sun	Elves, farmers
Freya, Goddess of Magic	NG	Good, Healing, Magic, Travel	Women, healers, sorcerers, wizards
Frigga, Queen of the Gods	LN	Healing, Law, Protection, Strength	Women, nobles
Heimdall, God of Sentries	LG	Good, Knowledge, Law, Protection	Paladins, sentries, guardians
Hel, Goddess of the Underworld	NE	Death, Destruction, Evil, Trickery	Necromancers
Loki, God of Trickery	CE	Chaos, Evil, Fire, Trickery	Rogues, assassins, liars, and cheats
Sif, Goddess of Warriors	CG	Good, Protection, Strength, War	Fighters, soldiers
Surtur, King of the Fire Giants	LE	Destruction, Evil, Fire, Sun	Fire giants
Thor, God of Thunder	CG	Air, Chaos, Strength, War	Barbarians, fighters, soldiers
Tyr, God of Justice	LG	Good, Law, Protection, War	Paladins, judges, warriors
Thrym, King of the Frost Giants	CE	Destruction, Evil, Strength, War	Frost giants
Uller, God of Archers	CN	Animals, Chaos, Luck, Travel	Hunters, archers

MIX AND MATCH PANTHEON

	Align.		Typical Worshipers
Amora, Goddess of Love	NG	Air, Good, Healing	Lovers, people looking for love
Aos, God of Wealth	N	Luck, Travel, Trickery	Merchants, thieves
Argena, Goddess of the Moon	CG	Good, Healing, Protection, Trickery	Elves, healers
Corellon Larethian, God of Woodlands	CG	Chaos, Good, Plant, Protection	Elves, rangers, druids, hunters
Coreth, Goddess of Nature	N	Animal, Earth, Plant, Sun	Druids
Garl Glittergold, God of Illusions and Humor	NG	Good, Protection, Trickery	Artists, bards, actors, gnomes
Gruumsh, God of Violence	CE	Destruction, Evil, Strength, War	Evil fighters, orcs
Hishrak, God of Tyranny	LE	Destruction, Evil, Law, War	Tyrants, evil fighters and wizards
Intara, Goddess of Magic	N	Knowledge, Magic, Trickery	Wizards, sorcerers
Moradin, God of the Forge	LG	Earth, Good, Law, Protection	Dwarves, smiths, crafters
Neleva, Goddess of Retribution	LN	Destruction, Law, Protection, Strength	Fighters, monks, paladins
Romas, God of the Sea	CN	Air, Chaos, Water	Sailors, fishermen
Solis, God of the Sun	LG	Good, Healing, Strength, Sun	Paladins, rangers, bards, farmers
Uria, Goddess of Death	NE	Death, Destruction, Evil	Necromancers
Yondalla, Goddess of the Hearth	LG	Good, Law, Protection	Homemakers, families, halflings

CHAMPIONS OF VIRTUE

New Prestige Classes for Clerics

by James Wyatt • illustrated by Mike May

Heironeous, Pelor, Ehlonna, and Kord might be among the most popular deities worshiped by clerics in the D&D game, as they are the four deities of good alignment not tied to a specific race. At the same time, these deities vividly demonstrate that there is nothing boring or homogeneous about good, as four deities more different from each other would be hard to find. Accordingly, the clerics of these four deities—while they all share access to the Good domain—follow widely divergent paths and often arrive at very different destinations.

The churches of these four deities all have prestige classes associated with their greatest champions—often clerics, but sometimes paladins or other characters. The shining blade of Heironeous, the radiant servant of Pelor, the fleet runner of Ehlonna, and the mighty contender of Kord illustrate better than anything the differences among the churches of these deities, not to mention the deities themselves.

The Shining Blade of Heironeous

Heironeous's teachings focus on promoting good through the use of armed force. Those among Heironeous's servants, both clerics and paladins, who aspire to become mighty weapons in their deity's unending war against evil hope one day to enter the shining blades. The shining blades of Heironeous is an order of knights dedicated to prowess in melee combat, which is achieved through prayer, devotion, and asceticism. Members of the shining blades have an austere and simple lifestyle, forsaking all worldly wealth and many earthly pleasures in their quest to become but a blade in the hand of Heironeous.

Most shining blades of Heironeous are clerics or paladins. Some members of the order believe that a minimum of training as a cleric, combined with the intense martial discipline of the fighter, is ideal to achieve the goal the shining blades seek, while others follow a single class exclusively. Very few multiclass arcane spellcasters, rogues, or monks feel drawn to the shining blades.

NPC members of the shining blades are probably the most devout, single-minded, and driven crusaders in the world. Consumed with passion for the path they have chosen, they have little patience for those who are "blinded" by desire for material goods or personal power. All that matters, they believe and preach, is the fight against evil; as long as evil remains strong there is important work to be done.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the shining blade of Heironeous prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Shining blades are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all armor, and with shields.

Detect Evil: A shining blade of Heironeous can *detect evil* as a spell-like ability.

Smite Evil: Once per day, a shining blade of Heironeous can attempt to smite evil with one normal melee attack. He adds his Charisma modifier (if positive) to his attack roll and deals 1 extra point of damage per shining blade level. If the shining blade accidentally smites a creature that is not evil, the smite

THE SHINING BLADE OF HEIRONEOUS — HIT DIE D10

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	*Detect evil*, smite evil 1/day	
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	Shock blade 1/day	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3		
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Smite evil 2/day	+1 level of existing class
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Holy blade 2/day	
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5		+1 level of existing class
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	Smite evil 3/day	
8th	+6	+6	+2	+6		+1 level of existing class
9th	+6	+6	+3	+6	Radiant blade 3/day	
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	Celestial transformation, smite evil 4/day	+1 level of existing class

has no effect but it is still used up for that day.

At 4th level, the shining blade can smite evil twice per day. At 7th level, the shining blade can smite evil three times per day. At 10th level, the shining blade can smite evil four times per day. These smite evil attempts are gained in addition to any gained through other classes (such as the paladin's ability of the same name).

Spells per Day: A shining blade continues the magical training he began as a divine spellcaster. For every two shining blade levels gained (2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th), the character gains new spells per day as if he had also gained one level in a divine spellcasting class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit of the spellcasting class. This essentially means that he adds half his shining blade levels to the level of some other divine spellcasting class the character has, then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly. For example, if Jeruk, a 10th-level paladin/1st-level shining blade, gains a level in shining blade, he gains new spells as if he had risen to 11th level in paladin, but he uses the other shining blade aspects of level progression, such as base attack bonus and base saving throw bonuses. If he next gains a level

CLASS REQUIREMENTS	
To qualify to become a shining blade of Heironeous, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:	
ALIGNMENT	LAWFUL GOOD
PATRON DEITY	HEIRONEOUS
BASE ATTACK BONUS	+7
BASE WILL SAVE	+3
SKILLS	KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION): 7 RANKS
SPELLCASTING	ABILITY TO CAST DIVINE SPELLS

CLASS SKILLS	
Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier	
The shining blade's class skills (organized by key ability) are:	
STRENGTH	
DEXTERITY	
CONSTITUTION	CONCENTRATION
INTELLIGENCE	CRAFT, KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION), SCRY, SPELLCRAFT
WISDOM	HEAL, PROFESSION
CHARISMA	DIPLOMACY

of paladin, making him an 11th-level paladin/2nd-level shining blade, he gains spells as if he had risen to 12th-level paladin.

Shock Blade: Once per day, as a standard action, a shining blade of Heironeous can cause a slashing or piercing weapon he is holding to become a shock weapon, dealing +1d6 points of bonus electricity damage on a successful hit. The weapon is enhanced this way for up to a number of rounds equal to the shining blade's level plus his Charisma bonus (if any), but only so long as the shining blade is holding the weapon. If he is disarmed or gives the weapon to another character, the magical effect ends. This is a supernatural ability.

Holy Blade: At 5th level, the shining blade can bestow two magical enhancements upon his weapon. This supernatural ability replaces the shock blade ability and can be used twice per day. With each use of this ability, he can choose to make the weapon a shock weapon dealing +1d6 damage or a holy weapon dealing +2d6 points of bonus holy (good) damage against evil creatures. The weapon is enhanced this way for up to a number of rounds equal to the shining blade's level plus his Charisma bonus (if any), but only so long as the shining blade is holding the weapon. If he is disarmed or gives the weapon to another character, the magical effect ends. The two uses of this ability can overlap, so in a given combat a shining blade can spend one standard action to make his blade holy and another to make it a shock weapon. The weapon cannot be made to be doubly holy or doubly shocking.

Radiant Blade: At 9th level, a shining blade can bestow three magical enhancements upon his weapon. This supernatural ability replaces the holy blade ability and can be used three times per day. With each use of this ability, he can choose to make the weapon a shock weapon dealing +1d6 damage, a holy weapon dealing +2d6 points of bonus holy (good) damage against evil creatures, or a brilliant energy weapon, which sheds light as a torch and ignores nonliving matter (including armor, undead, constructs, and objects). The weapon is enhanced this way for up to a number of rounds equal to the shining blade's level plus his Charisma bonus (if any), but only so long as the shining blade is holding the weapon. If he is disarmed or gives the weapon to another character, the magical effect ends. The three uses of this ability can overlap, so in a given combat a shining blade can spend one standard action to make his blade holy, another to make it a shock weapon, and another to make it a brilliant energy weapon. The weapon cannot be made to be doubly holy, doubly shocking, or doubly brilliant.

Celestial Transformation: A 10th-level shining blade of Heironeous actually becomes a celestial creature, taking on a shining, metallic appearance and adopting the celestial creature template from the *Monster Manual*.

Multiclass Note: Paladin characters can freely multiclass with this class.

The Radiant Servant of Pelor

Pelor teaches demonstrating the strength of good through charity and modesty. While it seems a contradiction, the point is that the truly strong don't need to prove their power. Pelor urges his priests and their flocks to perform so many good acts that evil has no room to exist, but he acknowledges that there are times when evil must be defeated in direct confrontation. The radiant servants of Pelor put this dogma into living practice. As the name implies, the brothers and sisters of the radiant servants of Pelor are sworn to serve—to minister to the needs of Pelor's followers and good-hearted people everywhere. While combating evil, particularly undead, is an important part of that service, it is by no means the only part. Radiant servants of Pelor are healers, counselors, sources of spiritual and (at times) financial support, and protectors.

Almost all radiant servants of Pelor spend their prior careers as clerics.

NPC radiant servants of Pelor can be found wherever there is human need—in the midst of plague and famine, behind the lines of an army at war, in villages plagued by hauntings, and in cities troubled by crime.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the radiant servant of Pelor prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Radiant servants are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all armor, and with shields.

Radiance: When a radiant servant of Pelor casts any spell with the Light descriptor, the radius of illumination is doubled, and the spell is treated as if it were one level higher than it actually is for all purposes, including determining whether it can counter or dispel a Darkness spell. Thus, a *daylight* spell cast by a radiant servant sheds light in a 120-foot radius, and is treated as a 4th-level spell, allowing it to counter or dispel any Darkness spell of 4th level or lower.

THE RADIANT SERVANT OF PELOR

HIT DIE D6

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Radiance, turn undead, extra greater turning	+1 level of existing class
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	Empower healing, divine health	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	Aura of warding	+1 level of existing class
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4		+1 level of existing class
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Additional domain	+1 level of existing class
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5	Maximize healing	+1 level of existing class
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5		+1 level of existing class
8th	+6	+6	+2	+6	Positive energy burst	+1 level of existing class
9th	+6	+6	+3	+6		+1 level of existing class
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	Supreme healing	+1 level of existing class

Turn Undead: A radiant servant adds his radiant servant class levels to his cleric levels for all purposes related to turning undead.

Extra Greater Turning: If a radiant servant has access to the Sun domain, he can perform a greater turning (the granted power of the Sun domain) a number of times per day equal to three plus her Charisma modifier.

Spells per Day: A radiant servant continues the divine spellcasting training she began. Thus, when a new radiant servant level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if she had also gained a level in a divine spellcasting class she belonged to before she added the prestige class. She does not, however, gain any other benefit of the spellcasting class (except for turning undead, as noted above). This essentially means that she adds the radiant servant levels to the level of some other spellcasting class the character has, then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly. For example, if Matara, a 6th-level cleric, gains a level in radiant servant, she gains new spells per day as if she had risen to 7th level in cleric, but she uses the other radiant servant aspects of

CLASS REQUIREMENTS	
To qualify to become a radiant servant of Pelor, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:	
ALIGNMENT	NEUTRAL GOOD
PATRON DEITY	PELOR
BASE WILL SAVE	+5
SKILLS	KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION): 9 RANKS HEAL: 5 RANKS KNOWLEDGE (UNDEAD): 3 RANKS
FEATS	EXTRA TURNING
SPELLCASTING	ABILITY TO CAST DIVINE SPELLS

CLASS SKILLS	
Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier	
The radiant servant's class skills are:	
STRENGTH	
DEXTERITY	
CONSTITUTION	CONCENTRATION
INTELLIGENCE	CRAFT, KNOWLEDGE (ARCANA), KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION), SCRY, SPELLCRAFT
WISDOM	HEAL, PROFESSION, SENSE MOTIVE
CHARISMA	DIPLOMACY

level progression such as base attack bonus and base saving throw bonuses. If she next gains a level of cleric, making her a 7th-level cleric/1st-level radiant servant, she gains spells as if she had risen to 8th-level cleric.

Empower Healing: When a radiant servant of Pelor of at least 2nd level casts a domain spell from the Healing domain, that spell is affected as though by the Empower Spell feat. The spell does not use up a higher-level slot.

Divine Health: A radiant servant of Pelor who is at least 2nd level is immune to all diseases, including magical diseases such as mummy rot and lycanthropy.

Aura of Warding: At 3rd level, a radiant servant and all allies within 10 feet of her gain a +2 morale bonus to all Will saving throws.

Additional Domain: A radiant servant who reaches 5th level is granted another of Pelor's domains as a third clerical domain. She can use the granted power of the domain, and can choose from the spell lists of three domains when selecting her domain spells for the day. She can only cast one domain spell of each level (1st through 9th) per day. Radiant servants without a level of cleric gain no benefit from this granted ability.

Maximize Healing: When a radiant servant of Pelor who is at least 6th level casts a domain spell from the Healing domain, that spell is affected as though by the Maximize Spell feat. The spell does not use up a higher-level slot. This power supercedes the Empower Healing ability until the character reaches 10th level.

Positive Energy Burst: As a standard action a radiant servant who is at least 8th level can create a positive energy burst that inflicts 1d6 points of damage per class level to all undead creatures within 100 feet of the character. Undead are allowed a Reflex save (DC equal to 10 + the class level of the radiant servant) to avoid half the damage. This supernatural ability uses up two turning attempts. A radiant servant can not use this ability if she has fewer than two turning attempts left for the day.

Supreme Healing: When a radiant servant of Pelor who is at least 10th level casts a domain spell from the Healing domain, that spell is affected as though by both the Empower Spell and the Maximize Spell feats. The spell does not use up a higher-level slot.

The Fleet Runner of Ehlonna

In the wild, speed is sometimes essential. Often, an animal's only hope of survival is to outrun another creature. Certain followers of Ehlonna, goddess of the woodlands, emulate this aspect of the natural world above all others, cultivating their natural speed until they become like the deer leaping between the trees—or, eventually, the wind that blows through them.

Most fleet runners of Ehlonna are clerics or druids who serve that deity, though a number of rangers also follow this path. Multiclass cleric/rangers or druid/rangers quite often become fleet runners, but members of other classes are rarely interested.

NPC fleet runners are almost feral creatures of the woodland. They have been known to run with the centaurs and dance with the satyrs, though many prefer the company of animals to that of more sophisticated creatures. They use their speed and travel-related abilities in defense of the woodlands—to carry messages, send for aid, or bring aid themselves.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the fleet runner of Ehlonna prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Fleet runners are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all armor, and with shields.

Fast Movement: The fleet runner has a speed faster than what is normal for her race by +10 feet when wearing no armor, light armor, or medium armor (and not carrying a heavy load). For example, a human fleet runner in studded leather armor has a standard speed of 40 feet. This increase stacks with similar speed increases, such as from the barbarian or monk classes. This is an extraordinary ability.

Greater Mobility: A fleet runner of Ehlonna gets a +8 dodge bonus to Armor Class against attacks of opportunity caused when she moves out of or within a threatened area. This supercedes the bonus granted by the Mobility feat. This is an extraordinary ability.

Additional Domain: A fleet runner gains access to another of Ehlonna's domains as a third clerical domain. She can use the granted power of the domain (using her fleet runner level instead of her cleric level), and can choose from the spell lists of three domains when selecting her domain spells for the day. She can cast only one domain spell of each level (1st through 9th) per day. Fleet runners without a level of cleric gain no benefit from this granted ability.

Bonus Spells: Similar to bonus spells for high ability scores, for each level of fleet runner that a spellcasting character attains, she gains bonus spells to the number of divine spells per day she

THE FLEET RUNNER OF EHLONNA

HIT DIE D8

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Fast movement, greater mobility, additional domain	1
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	Evasion	2
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	*Leap of the hart*	1
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Shot on the Run feat	2
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	*Run like the huntress*	1
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5	Improved evasion	2
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	*Run like the wind*	1
8th	+6	+6	+2	+6	Leopard's pounce	2
9th	+6	+6	+3	+6	Swiftness of the tigress	1
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	Cheetah's sprint	2

normally casts. These bonus spells can be added to any level of spells the fleet runner can currently cast, but no more than one can be added to the character's highest current spell level. For example, Farella is a 9th-level cleric of Ehlonna who takes one level in fleet runner. She can give herself one bonus 5th-level spell (her highest as a 9th-level cleric), and one bonus spell in one other level (0 through 4th).

If a fleet runner has two divine spellcasting classes already, she must choose which previous class of spells gains the bonus. For example, Jecara is a 3rd-level druid/8th-level ranger, with one level of fleet runner. Conceivably, Jecara could have a bonus 2nd-level druid spell and a bonus 2nd-level ranger spell, or she could put both bonus spells in either druid or ranger, but then only one of them could be 2nd level. Bonus spells cannot be added to an arcane spellcasting class.

Once a fleet runner has chosen how to apply her bonus spells, they cannot be shifted again.

Evasion: At 2nd level and above, a fleet runner can avoid even magical and unusual attacks with great agility. If the fleet runner akes a successful Reflex saving throw against an attack that normally deals half damage on a

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a fleet runner of Ehlonna, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

ALIGNMENT	NEUTRAL GOOD
PATRON DEITY	EHLONNA
BASE WILL SAVE	+3
SKILLS	KNOWLEDGE (NATURE): 11 RANKS KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION): 3 RANKS WILDERNESS LORE: 5 RANKS
FEATS	DODGE, MOBILITY, RUN
SPELLCASTING	ABILITY TO CAST DIVINE SPELLS

CLASS SKILLS

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

The fleet runner's class skills (organized by key ability) are:

STRENGTH	
DEXTERITY	HIDE, MOVE SILENTLY
CONSTITUTION	CONCENTRATION
INTELLIGENCE	KNOWLEDGE (NATURE), KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION)
WISDOM	HEAL, INTUIT DIRECTION, WILDERNESS LORE
CHARISMA	

successful save, she instead takes no damage. The fleet runner can use evasion only if she is wearing light armor or no armor. This is an extraordinary ability.

Leap of the Hart: At 3rd level or higher, a fleet runner's jumping distance (vertical or horizontal) is not limited according to her height. This is an extraordinary ability.

Shot on the Run: At 4th level, the fleet runner gains the Shot on the Run feat, even if she does not have the prerequisite Point Blank Shot feat.

Run Like the Huntress: At 5th level, a fleet runner gains supernatural stamina while running. She can run for a number of rounds equal to twice her Constitution score without making any checks, and she gains a +8 bonus to Constitution checks made to continue running after that point. This is a supernatural ability.

Improved Evasion: At 6th level, a fleet runner's evasion ability improves. She still takes no damage on a successful Reflex save against spells such as fireball or a breath weapon, but henceforth she only takes half damage on a failed save. The fleet runner can only use improved evasion if she is wearing light armor or no armor. This is an extraordinary ability.

Run Like the Wind: At 7th level, a fleet runner can slip magically between spaces, as per the spell *dimension door,* once per day as a spell-like ability. The fleet runner's effective caster level equals her class level.

Leopard's Pounce: At 8th level, a fleet runner can make a full attack at the end of a charge. This is an extraordinary ability.

Swiftness of the Tigress: When she reaches 9th level, a fleet runner can act as if under the effects of a *haste* spell for a total of 1 round per class level per day. These rounds need not be consecutive. This is an extraordinary ability.

Cheetah's Sprint: Once an hour, a 10th-level fleet runner can take a charge action to move ten times her normal speed. This is a supernatural ability.

The Mighty Contender of Kord

The church of Kord insists that the liberation of the spirit comes through the perfection of the body—in fact, clerics of the Brawler insist that the distinction between body and spirit is a false one, as each is totally dependent on the other. Some devotees of Kord practice breaking chains (a DC 26 Strength check), demonstrating their bodily perfection while symbolizing their spiritual freedom. Those that seek the highest perfection of body and spirit become mighty contenders of Kord.

Most mighty contenders of Kord start as clerics, but fighters and barbarians can enter the class easily by multiclassing as clerics, and many do. Arcane spellcasters are unlikely to find the church of Kord's emphasis on physical strength appealing, but there are exceptions—particularly among the rare half-orc sorcerers.

NPC mighty contenders are an unusual mixture of athletic mysticism. They are very worldly, as a rule, frequenting public baths, gymnasiums, or taverns while expounding their philosophy of spiritual and physical liberation, and demonstrating their feats of incredible strength.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the mighty contender of Kord prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Mighty contenders are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all armor, and with shields.

Mighty Endurance: A mighty contender has a special form of damage reduction that allows him to ignore 5 points of subdual damage every time he is dealt subdual damage. This extraordinary ability applies to all effects that deal subdual damage.

Feat of Strength: When a mighty contender performs a feat of strength (the granted power of the Strength domain), he adds his mighty contender level to his cleric levels to determine his Strength enhancement for 1 round. He can now perform a feat of strength a number of times per day equal to his unmodified Strength modifier, but always at least once.

Spells per Day: A mighty contender continues the divine spellcasting training he began, but more slowly. For every two contender levels gained, the character gains new spells per day as if he had gained one level of the spellcasting class he belonged to before he added the prestige class. He does not gain any other benefit of the level (such as turning undead) that the character would have gained. This essentially means that he adds half his mighty contender level to the level of some other spellcasting class he has, then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly. For example, if Gilgas, an 8th-level cleric/1st-level mighty contender, gains another level in mighty contender, he gains new spells as if he

THE MIGHTY CONTENDER OF KORD

HIT DIE D10

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Mighty endurance, feat of strength	
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3		+1 level of existing class
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	Surge of strength	
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4		+1 level of existing class
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Strength increase	
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5		+1 level of existing class
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	Feat of power	
8th	+6	+6	+2	+6		+1 level of existing class
9th	+6	+6	+3	+6	Strength increase	
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	Surge of power	+1 level of existing class

had risen to 9th level in cleric, but uses the other contender aspects of level progression such as base attack and saving throw bonus. If he next gains a level of cleric, making him a 10th-level cleric/2nd-level mighty contender, he gains spells as an 11th-level cleric.

Surge of Strength: When a mighty contender of at least 3rd level performs a feat of strength, the enhancement bonus lasts for 1d4+1 rounds.

Strength Increase: When a mighty contender reaches 5th level, and again at 9th level, his Strength score increases by 1. This is not an enhancement bonus; it is an ability score increase like any character normally gains every four levels.

Feat of Power: Once per day, as a supernatural ability, when performing a surge of strength, a mighty contender of 7th level or higher can add one and a half times his combined cleric and mighty contender levels to his Strength score for the first round of the surge. For the remaining 1d4 rounds, he adds only his level to his Strength score.

Surge of Power (Su): Once per day, as a supernatural ability, when performing a surge of strength, a 10th-level mighty contender can add one and a half times his level to his Strength score for the duration of the surge (1d4+1 rounds).

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CLASS REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a mighty contender of Kord, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

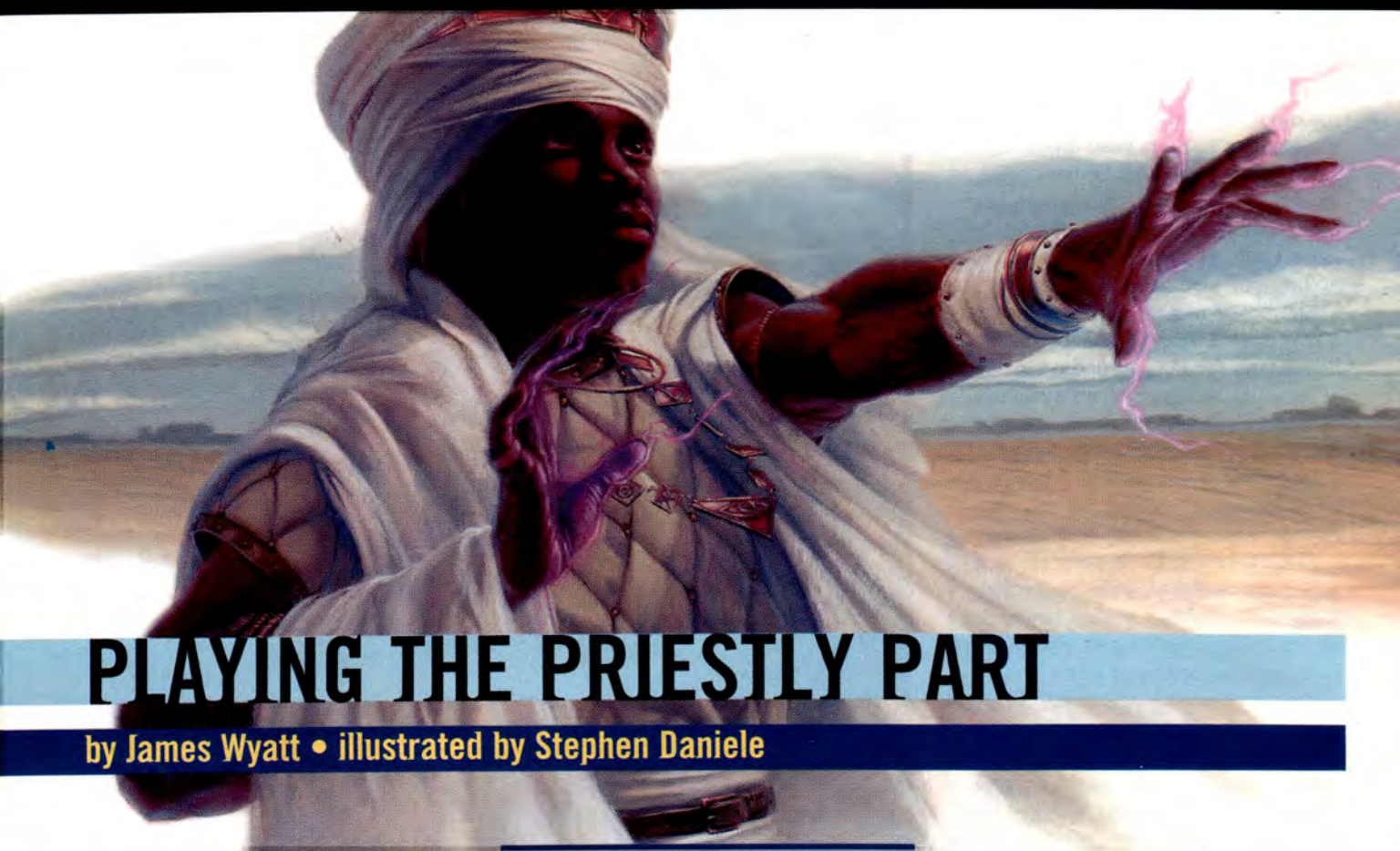
ALIGNMENT	CHAOTIC GOOD
PATRON DEITY	KORD
BASE FORTITUDE SAVE	+6
SKILLS	KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION): 9 RANKS
FEATS	ENDURANCE, POWER ATTACK
SPELLCASTING	ABILITY TO CAST DIVINE SPELLS

CLASS SKILLS

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

The mighty contender's class skills are:

STRENGTH	
DEXTERITY	
CONSTITUTION	CONCENTRATION
INTELLIGENCE	CRAFT, KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION), SCRY, SPELLCRAFT
WISDOM	HEAL, INTUIT DIRECTION, PROFESSION, SENSE MOTIVE
CHARISMA	DIPLOMACY, INTIMIDATE



PLAYING THE PRIESTLY PART

by James Wyatt • illustrated by Stephen Daniele

"Cleric!" The cry of the wounded warrior has become a D&D synonym for "Medic!" Clerics are too often used only to provide healing magic. At the opposite extreme is the stereotypical NPC cleric: a fanatic member of a crazed cult whose foul rites the heroes must stop.

It doesn't have to be this way. Played well, a cleric character can have a pivotal role in shaping the flavor of the game. NPC priests can be three-dimensional characters who give a campaign a fresh breath of life. Players and DMs alike should carefully consider three major aspects of clerics in D&D: the function of a cleric in the community (primarily NPCs), the role of the adventuring cleric (primarily PCs), and the special qualities of divine magic and its use in the campaign.

The Good Shepherd: Clerics as Community Leaders

Clerics are a central and vitally important part of their communities. They are likely the most well-educated yet accessible people in a town or village, and their position brings them into contact with both the word on the street and the news from the upper echelons of society. Most are wise and insightful, even those who are not scholarly. Among other reasons, these qualities make clerics a valuable resource to player characters in a D&D campaign, and their utility goes far beyond their magical capabilities.

What To Expect from Clerics

It is perfectly reasonable for characters to hope to find services and information such as these in any temple:

Gossip: Clerics hear everything in the course of their daily activities. Whether they choose to repeat it is up to them, and most clerics are not easy to bribe, but if people are saying it, it's likely the clerics have heard it. Clerics are a great source for verifying rumors.

Local History: Clerics tend to know a lot about the towns in which they live, as well as the surrounding region. Even if they didn't grow up there, people have told them the stories over and over again. Clerics know the important people in town, who does reliable work, and the story behind the ancient ruins at the top of the hill. Actually, they probably know several conflicting stories about those ancient ruins. Sorting out the conflicts and determining veracity is not really the cleric's department, unless history is a private hobby.

Historical Records: Temples often maintain careful historical records that might be useful to adventurers. They are especially good resources for everyday sorts of information—not the sweeping epics of nations, but simple facts about when ordinary people were born and when they died. Except in a society that is unusually bureaucratic, temples might be the only source of such records.

Religious Information: Clerics tend to be well-educated, but sometimes their education is specialized. If nothing else, a local cleric is a reliable source of information about the cleric's own faith, and he might know a fair amount about other religions popular in the town. A cleric likely also knows about faiths his order perceives as a threat, although much of that information might be strongly biased. Note that some religions hold their beliefs and practices, or at least the most sacred of them, in

utter secrecy—not necessarily because they have anything to hide but because these elements of their faith are too holy to share with nonbelievers.

Political Information: Many clerics follow local politics. They know not only who's on the town council but also each person's agenda and voting record. They know the hot issues both of the moment and of the past.

Counseling: Clerics are a great source of advice. Wisdom and intuition are part of it, and life experience is another. Clerics have been around; they've seen a lot and heard a lot. Even today in the real world, a large percentage of professional counseling is performed by clergy.

Charity: This might vary widely from religion to religion in your campaign. In the real world, Buddhist monks rely on the generosity of others for their daily food, while one Roman writer complained that the early Christians were making the pagan Romans look bad by taking such good care of the poor, pagan and Christian alike. Still, in many faiths, characters who are down on their luck might hope for a night's food and lodging at the local temple. (Woe to anyone who violates the gift of hospitality by robbing the temple! A deity's worst curses are often reserved for this sort of offense.)

Sanctuary: In some societies, temples and clerics operate under a legal system completely separate from that of the surrounding kingdom, or at least they have some special privileges under the law. In these societies, it might be possible for characters who have been accused of a crime under secular law to appeal to the temple for sanctuary. If they can convince the cleric of their innocence, they might be safe from arrest and prosecution as long as they remain within the temple, buying them time to collect more evidence of their innocence.

Worship, Prayers, and Sacrifices: Of course, clerics are not only key members of their communities but also religious professionals, which is to say they are usually seen as the intermediaries between humanity and the gods. When PCs feel the need to offer sacrifices to a god, to ask a deity's favor, or just to offer worship, clerics are happy to serve in their clerical capacity, usually even on behalf of total strangers. Many NPC clerics are so tired of being asked for information and advice that they would love to be approached for this reason!

Simple Magic: A cleric's spells are bestowed by a deity for a purpose. When it squares with the deity's desires, clerics are free to use these spells even to help nonbelievers. Some deities (a god of healing, for example) command their clerics to help anyone in need, while clerics of any faith might see the use of healing magic in particular as an effective form of preaching. Receiving a god's healing touch (through a cleric) is concrete evidence that the god is real and powerful. Note, however, that powerful magic, even when available to an NPC cleric, is usually reserved for extraordinary circumstances. Also note that it's entirely possible that local NPC clerics do not have access to any spells whatsoever. Divine spells might be the province of the most faithful, devoted, or important of a god's clerics (which, naturally, includes cleric PCs).

What Not To Expect from Clerics

What should player characters not hope to receive from NPC clerics? Remember that any cleric's responsibility is primarily to a deity and secondarily to the local community. Unless the characters are active members of a worshiping community, they should not expect clerics to offer these services:

In-depth Investigation: Imagine that a rash of murders is plaguing a small town, and the heroes consult the local cleric. The cleric knows everyone who's been killed, as well as a wide variety of popular speculations about the killings, but the cleric has no idea who the killer is. The cleric has been too busy performing funerals and comforting the bereaved to snoop around for clues. Clerics rarely moonlight as detectives, and those who do are usually PCs.

Sacraments or Rites of Passage: Every religion has its rituals, and some of the most important of these are rites that mark the stages of life: birth, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, and death. These rites are sacred and important not just to a religion, but to a community. Thus, characters who are not a part of the community should not expect to participate in these rites. (Even modern clergy often struggle with the question of whether to perform marriages and baptisms for people who are not active in the community.)

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM CLERICS:

+ Gossip
+ Local History
+ Historical Records
+ Religious Information
+ Political Information
+ Counseling
+ Charity
+ Sanctuary
+ Worship
+ Simple Magic

WHAT NOT TO EXPECT FROM CLERICS:

+ In-depth Investigation
+ Rites of Passage
+ Raising the Dead
+ Anything to Excess

Raising the Dead: Everyone dies. Who gets to decide whether a person should be raised from the dead? Even if every local NPC cleric in your campaign is powerful enough to raise the dead, they shouldn't bestow this gift lightly, and they shouldn't be bribed into bestowing it, either. Like Miracle Max in *The Princess Bride,* a cleric needs a good reason to bring someone back from the dead. Such a miraculous event is usually reserved only for the greatest heroes of the faith.

Anything to Excess: Clerics of many religions are expected to be giving, but nobody demands they be stupid. Clerics know when they're being taken advantage of, and most are strong enough to say no when it's time to say no. At the least, if the same characters are coming to a cleric over and over, the cleric is going to start putting pressure on them to join the community in worship. At worst, the characters might find they are no longer welcome in the temple.

These are only general guidelines. Not all clerics are tuned in to local politics, and some are perhaps over-generous with sacraments and spells. But if the majority of clerics in your campaign follow the general outline here, then the exceptions are more likely to stand out in the players' minds—and in yours. If you decide that a local cleric has been investigating the bloody murders that have plagued her town, immediately you've got a hook on which to hang the rest of her personality. She might have some wild theories that lead the PCs in the wrong direction, or she might be right on target but sound so improbable that the PCs don't believe her evidence. In any case, she can add a new dimension to the adventure, and she will quickly become much more than a cardboard stereotype of a local NPC cleric.

Speaking of Stereotypes . . .

There's nothing inherently wrong with using crazed cultists in a D&D game; just make sure the cult has some internal consistency, and makes sense from its own religious perspective. Remember that few people consider themselves to be evil, and a religious group is no exception. Political situations of occupation or oppression often give rise to fanatical cults in the real world, and they can give an interesting flavor in a fantasy campaign as well.

The leaders of these cults are responsible for the rites of initiation and the passing on of secret knowledge that gives the cult members a strong sense of identity. Otherwise, they perform much the same functions as their more mainstream counterparts, as described above—but never for outsiders. The non-cleric, ordinary members of a cult are no less fanatical than their leaders, and probably perform the bulk of the cult's dirty work . . . whatever that work happens to be.

The Shield of Faith: Clerics as Adventurers

Clerics have come a long way since the early days of fantasy roleplaying. Most players now can tell you the name of the god their character worships, and maybe even something about the tenets of the faith the cleric serves. Clerics often find much more variety in their spell selection—but it's still those healing spells that tend to be used most often. In itself, this sort of typecasting is not necessarily bad. Each character type has its strengths and weaknesses, and few other characters can offer any kind of healing ability. In a game where combat presents a challenge to the heroes, healing spells remain an essential part of the cleric's repertoire, as well as a reminder to all the PCs that the cleric serves a powerful god.

But what about the rest of the cleric's repertoire? If NPC clerics are known for being wise and knowledgeable, their adventuring counterparts should not be utterly clueless. Granted, a large part of what makes NPC clerics a valuable resource is their position in the community, which an adventuring cleric doesn't necessarily possess. But a DM who wants to encourage clerical roleplaying should give cleric characters a break. Assuming they have any kind of charisma, they should be able to collect gossip like a bard or similar street-savvy character. They should have some idea of the local history of their home region. They should know about local religions and politics, and have enough wisdom and life experience to be able to give good advice (with the DM's help, if necessary). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they should receive the respect of their non-adventuring peers, making them the best people to go to the local temples and make contact with NPC clerics. If a party needs charity, sanctuary, or just access to the record books, the party cleric should be the one to ask.

Some of this depends on the DM's cooperation and support, but there's a lot that players can do to flesh out their cleric characters. Selecting appropriate skills (Knowledge—local, Knowledge—religion, Gather Information, and so on) and not neglecting that Charisma score are some things a player can do. Clerics also need some special attention to their background and motivation as adventurers. Some of the key questions a player should answer about his cleric character include:

Why is this cleric adventuring? Most people find that settling in a town and serving a local temple is a perfectly valid way to demonstrate their devotion to most any deity. Why does this character not take that route? Is there an issue in his past that he needs to resolve by adventuring? Was there something special about his experience of being called, some unique sign or omen from his god that led him to pursue an adventuring career? Was he specially chosen by his superiors (or his god) for a mission that takes him adventuring? On the other hand, perhaps his own ego leads him to believe that his god must intend bigger and more interesting things for him than the mundane task of serving in a local temple.

Why is this cleric adventuring in this company? This might be one of the trickiest questions, particularly if the PC party includes characters of vastly different backgrounds and beliefs. The

other PCs might be old friends from the cleric's youth who chose different paths in adulthood, but who still need a cleric's guiding hand in their adventuring. Or one PC could be related to the cleric (sibling, child, parent, third cousin), perhaps someone whom the cleric feels obligated to protect.

With the cooperation of the other players and the DM, the entire party could adventure together in the service of a religion. *The Complete Book of Villains* features such a party as a running example throughout the book. Their adventures serve the cause of the church, and they report to superiors who are NPC clerics. This style of play demands certain standards from the characters, but in return they can expect a great deal more from NPC clerics than outlined above!

In a twist to this scenario, the cleric character in a party might know something that the other characters don't know about their mission—they could be on a quest for the cleric's church without even realizing it! In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings,* a group of adventurers (the Fellowship) is drawn into the cosmic struggle between good and evil through the influence of Gandalf—a divine creature with a divine purpose, really more like a cleric than a wizard. A cleric character could play the same sort of role in a fantasy game, creating a fascinating campaign scenario.

What does this character hope to gain or accomplish by adventuring? This is a valid question for any type of character, but the answers for cleric characters often (though not always) look a little different. Clerics tend to see their mission and purpose in broader, more cosmic terms than most other characters. They are less often motivated by greed, revenge, or lust for power, and more often driven by a sense of calling, a desire to see a deity's cause advanced in the world, or a thirst for spiritual or worldly knowledge. This is not to say that all clerics—or even most clerics—are entirely above baser motivations, but most often those other desires are mingled with a more spiritual drive. A cleric might adventure out of a religious drive to better the lot of the peasants of his home village, leading him to donate most of the treasure he finds to the villagers. Another cleric might be searching for a long-lost holy relic, traveling the world and asking at every stop for signs of its appearance. Still another might be hoping to fulfill some ancient prophecy, nudging world and local events in the right direction in order to bring in the new age a little more quickly.

As in this last example, sometimes even a cleric's spiritual motivations seem a little pathological. For example, a cleric might believe he is called to single-handedly save the world, redeem an arch-villain, convert the heathens, or lead a crusade to liberate the Holy Land. His whole-hearted service to his deity might also stem from the hope of winning a special place in the deity's heart in the afterlife, in the heart of a certain NPC, or in one's family—a somewhat more attainable goal, but in the same category. A cleric could be driven by guilt stemming from a strict religious upbringing, or self-righteous fervor brought on by a more recent conversion experience. Such pathological characters can be great fun to play—they're certainly an interesting variation on the more standard dyed-in-the-wool fanatic.

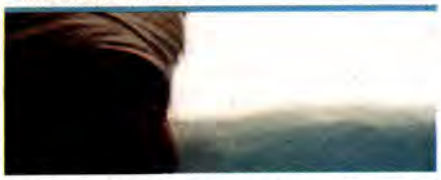
How does this character fit in with his religion? Was she brought up in this faith or brought into the faith as an adult? Is she the most devout and faithful believer who can see no wrong in the church or its clerics? (She might be in for some eye-opening surprises as the campaign progresses!) Perhaps she is a borderline heretic, questioning the authority of the church or its doctrines. Imagine an idealistic young cleric who started off serving local temples, only to discover that day-to-day affairs in the temple had more to do with politics than with serving the faith, and that the upper echelons of the temple hierarchy were thoroughly corrupt. Taking to a life of adventuring, such a character might be shunned by the established temple structure, while still in favor with her deity.

Even characters more radically separated from their established church might receive spells. Perhaps the temple hierarchy is so corrupt that none of its clerics have access to spells—only renegades like the player character do! The official doctrine of the temple might claim that their god does not grant spells, and that those who perform "miracles" in the deity's name are charlatans and heretics.

What is the character's relationship to his deity? The nature of the relationship between deity and cleric can be as complex and varied as the relationship between any two people: master and slave, ruler and subject, partners, friends, even lovers—in any combination and changing over time. Some clerics feel buoyed and supported by the constant love

of their god, while others feel used and discarded by an uncaring, inhuman power. Some clerics feel a much closer connection and relationship with the body of a god's followers than they do with the deity himself. Others are loners, spending their time seeking communion with their god in a mystical relationship.

Does the PC cleric serve willingly, even joyfully, overlooking the burdens of the position as insignificant compared to its blessings? Or does he serve his god grudgingly, feeling forced into the clergy by family or societal pressure, or even some manipulation on the deity's part? Perhaps years ago the character, caught between a rock and a hard place, implored a deity's favor with a bargain: "Get me out of this, and I'll become a cleric!" While faith and devotion are usually seen as prerequisites for clerics, and especially for the casting of divine spells, this is not necessarily the case. A character who has bargained himself into the clergy might find himself burdened with the ability to cast divine spells to further the god's aims in the world.



What does the deity ask or demand of the character? The responsibilities of clergy vary in magnitude from following a certain diet or wearing certain clothes to journeying halfway around the world on some divine mission. Typically, the obligations of most adventuring clerics fall somewhere in the middle: They are expected to follow the tenets of their faith and generally act in their deity's interests, but they rarely receive direct commissions from their god or even their religious hierarchy. A demanding deity, by contrast, could make for unusual and interesting play, as he sends his faithful minion on specific and dangerous missions, providing the cleric with the magical power she needs to succeed.

Signs and Wonders: Clerical Magic in the Campaign

There are a variety of approaches to understanding clerical magic—how it works, why the gods bestow these powers, who can use it, and its effects and implications. A DM can choose one approach or assign different viewpoints and mechanics to different religions. Players should work closely with the DM to determine how a cleric character's magic works.

Miracles of Faith

One common understanding of clerical magic is that it is tied to the cleric's extraordinary faith and devotion. Like saints or wonder-workers, cleric characters have attained a spiritual level that allows them to perform miracles in their god's name. Clerics in this approach must demonstrate the extreme devotion that allows them to channel the deity's power into spells and must be held to high standards of behavior and belief. Violations of these standards might result in characters losing some or all of their spell ability as just one sign of their god's displeasure. Conversely, divine favor might manifest in increased spell effects in cases where the cleric is acting entirely in his deity's interest.

If clerical magic depends on a cleric's faith, perhaps the spell power is actually a manifestation of that faith itself, rather than a gift of the cleric's deity. The effects are the same: Acting contrary to one's faith weakens that faith and might hamper spell ability, while a stronger faith results in stronger spells.

The Power of Ritual

Another view is that clerical magic is made possible by the correct performance of certain rituals invoking a deity's name and claiming some of that deity's power. In most cases, being a part of the ritually consecrated clergy remains a prerequisite for obtaining the desired results. (Attempting to invoke a god's power without meeting all the ritual requirements can be a dangerous thing!) As long as the cleric performs the ritual correctly, the spell will work as intended. It must be stressed, however, that part of performing the ritual correctly is being properly pure and clean from a ritual perspective. Violating the precepts of the faith or the demands of the deity makes one unclean and strips the cleric of his ritual power.

Deities in this approach do not necessarily play an active, determining role in their cleric's lives. In fact, it remains open to question whether the god or the cleric is in charge. Clerics are powerful individuals, shrouded in an aura of mystery and fear—they traffic with creatures ordinary people cannot see or hear, and some of the spirits' otherworldliness rubs off on them. Clerics using this approach should be eccentric at the least, and at most they might be supernatural creatures themselves.

The Hands of God

A third approach sees clerics as a god's hands in the world, and clerical magic the means by which the god's work is done through the cleric, either in voluntary partnership or unwilling servitude. In either case, cleric spells are bestowed in response to what the deity perceives as a specific need. A cleric is different from an avatar in that the cleric remains a human being, not a god's earthly manifestation. As a result, only so much of the god's power can be channeled through a cleric. Rather than a cleric choosing to cast a spell, it is more a case of a god choosing to work through that cleric. The cleric's spell ability might be unpredictable, and spells might happen around the cleric without the cleric's conscious involvement.

In this approach, the deity is definitely important in the cleric's day-to-day life, and there's no question about who's in charge. The cleric must be willing to go where the god wants him to go, at a moment's notice if necessary, so the god's work can be done. Spellcasting clerics should be rare and mysterious in a campaign that uses this approach, and common people should marvel at the clerics' miraculous powers. The clerics themselves might be rapt mystics who live for the close communion they experience when their god acts through them, or they might be disgruntled divine servitors who dread the manifestation of divine power they experience all too often. They might have chosen this path, or they might lie awake at night wondering why they were chosen. In any case, they are not people to be trifled with!

There are certainly other approaches to understanding clerical magic. Clerics might simply channel forces that suffuse the universe, being attuned to their patterns and able to shape them as they desire. They might be semi-divine creatures, able to work miracles by their nature. Let your imagination run free, sparked by the other ideas in this article. Your clerics—whether bold adventurers or the village pastors—will never be the same.

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CC2 is the industry-standard design software and now it's more flexible than ever before.

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REALISTIC RELIGION

Myth-Making with Universal Archetypes

by John Dougal McCarty

Religion has always been an essential part of human culture. Despite its importance in the real world, religion often gets short shrift in D&D campaigns. Characters either pay token attention to their deities or behave like fanatics. The gods themselves seem tailored to the adventurer's needs, divided among class, race, and alignment.

With a little imagination, you can combine the powerful mythic elements of real-world religion with the necessary game mechanics to give your D&D pantheon a touch of Promethean fire, inspiring players and characters alike.

Archetypes

Joseph Campbell led the way in showing that religions from all cultures follow definite patterns. By imitating these patterns, you can give religion in your campaign much greater depth. To be truly realistic, however, you shouldn't stop at just one religion.

D&D religions try to make internal sense by having one pantheon that applies to all cultures. In reality, each culture has its own distinct religion that might well conflict with those of other nearby cultures. Not only would demi-human races have their own beliefs but so would different human cultures.

Psychologist Carl Jung was the first to propose that religions had something in common: their mythologies. Stories from all religions have inevitable and obvious similarities that Jung called *archetypes*. The most famous of these is the flood myth, which is known in many different cultures throughout the world. The best explanation for this seems to be that archetypes are the result of psychological similarities among all humans. The stories we tell often fall into mythological patterns subconsciously. For a contemporary example, movies like *Charlie's Angels, The First Wives Club,* and the *Witches of Eastwick* all follow the "triple goddess" archetype. In each there is an innocent maiden, a sexual mother, and a wise crone similar to the Greek goddesses Persephone, Demeter, and Hecate.

Archetypes provide a blueprint on which you can base your original mythology. The better you understand the archetypes, the more deftly you can create a convincing game religion.

Writing Your Own Religion

Most D&D campaigns include a polytheistic religion. Even so, many of the elements of a pantheon also appear in monotheism and a variety of other forms of religion. No matter what structure you use for your own mythology, consider these tips:

Each culture should have its own religion. Currently, humans have a religion and demi-humans have "chief deities" that leech off of the human mythology. You needn't create a dozen complete mythologies from the beginning, but consider giving nonhuman races more depth than a single god. Consider including alternative versions of many myths, notably creation stories. Naturally, different human cultures should have their own religions, too.

Forget logic. Roleplaying religions often try to make internal, logical sense, but slavish logic has no place in mythology. Religions do not need to "mesh" with other religions, myths do not need

to withstand scientific or historical scrutiny. Inevitably, reasonable but irrelevant questions will arise: "If there are all of these gods, then some must be false, so where do their clerics get their power from?" and "Why don't the gods duke it out between pantheons?" Religions do not make linear sense; they are rooted in the subconscious.

If it ain't broke . . . If your campaign already has an established religion, don't fret. With a little adaptation, you might find that your existing pantheon and mythology are probably not far off the archetypal mark. The core D&D (Greyhawk) deities translate surprisingly well into the archetype schema.

Start slowly and look for inspiration. Reading about your favorite mythologies can give you loads of ideas for your D&D pantheon. If you don't have a favorite, try Greek or Norse mythology, both of which are usually available in easy-to-read versions and are prevalent in traditional fantasy. (Their game statistics appear in "Do-It-Yourself Deities," which begins on page 32.) Next, map out your ideas as they come to you, letting your imagination do the work. You will be surprised at the number of "original" ideas that match the archetype checklist.

Accept the free help. You might find that your players, especially those with clerics or paladins, will want to get into the act as well. Just give them a set of parameters for myth-making, perhaps the Archetype Checklist, and let them contribute.

The Purpose of Religion

All religions, in one way or another, seek to transform the individual follower into something that is greater than himself, although what this means varies a great deal. For some cultures, the ideal is a person of exacting morals and ethics; for others, it is someone with the courage and skill to fight; in still others, it is one who finds an inner sense of contentment and happiness.

Mythologies provide us with sympathetic heroes who challenge our fears of death and those parts of our nature that hold us back, ascending a higher state of being.

Finally, religions provide us with a way to communicate with the divine or numinous aspects of our lives. Even non-religious people partake of superstitions, daily horoscopes, and other acknowledgements that the world is full of forces beyond our ken.

DEITY ARCHETYPES

When deciding on which deities to include in your campaign, imagine how the god is pictured by worshipers. Also, consider the deity's relationship to other gods in the pantheon. In what myths does the deity appear? What is the deity's symbol? For game purposes, what alignments and domains are associated with the deity?

The Great Mother

Perhaps the most overwhelming universal deity of all is the Great Mother, a goddess of fertility. We even use the secular phrase "Mother Nature" to invoke this image. The Goddess is the focus of fertility and prosperity, and is usually seen as a sympathetic figure.

Alignment: Usually neutral good.

THE ARCHETYPE CHECKLIST

The following questions point to elements that exist in most real-world religions. As you brainstorm your own campaign's pantheon and mythology, use these questions for inspiration.

☐ Is the lore written or spoken?

Mythologies always begin as oral folklore that is transcribed in due time. How the mythology is remembered has a great impact on how the religion is administered, the level of control the clergy has, and how education is handled. When religions rely on the spoken word, the very act of speaking the myths aloud becomes a religious experience. Clerics are storytellers who guard the lore of their culture and have great control over interpreting the mythology. Memorizing the myths is important to clergy and laity alike.

If a culture has a written religion, the sacredness of the mythology is transferred to the physical text itself. The text becomes a powerful artifact within the context of the culture; its possession could indicate right of leadership. In several Chinese dynasties, holding the holy text was vital to control. In these cultures, writing becomes sacred; words and letters might now represent prayers or sacred places.

The transition between an oral and written mythology can be full of conflict. The Vedic verses of the Hindu religion met considerable resistance to being recorded. The followers believed that these words had originally been spoken by a god and thus should always be spoken, never written. Similar conflicts exist today with Native American stories as researchers try to record them, since many storytellers feel they should remain an oral tradition.

☐ What spaces are sacred?

We all know that Neolithic humans drew religious images on cave walls. What many do not know is that these caves were not homes; there is little evidence that they were used for anything other than painting and worship. Before we had buildings, we had temples. Sacred space is the idea that some places are holy and are to be treated with respect and reverence. This idea applies to places of worship and places significant to the religion, historically or theologically. Each religion has its own set of rules concerning appropriate behavior in a sacred place, but they always include use of ritual.

☐ What is the birth ritual?

The birth of a child is usually a cause for ceremony. These are usually simple affairs and might include immersing or touching the child with water, or giving it honey or gifts.

☐ What is the marriage ritual?

Marriage is one of the great universal ceremonies. It involves some sort of acknowledgement of the long commitment the couple is making. Marriages are usually joyous occasions; the celebration can last for days in some cultures. A member of the clergy or other respected spiritual leader is almost always present to officiate the union.

☐ What is the death ritual?

Death rituals go back to Neolithic times. There has always been a procedure in a culture to recognize death and dispose of the remains. Methods vary but usually include burial in earth or under cairns, cremation, some sort of corpse alteration such as mummification or removal of flesh, or disposing of the corpse in a body of water or a big hole in the ground. No matter how one dies, there is some procedure in place to take care of the remains. Death rituals are usually solemn and grievous, but some include parties or feasts.

Suggested Domains: Earth, Good, Healing, Plant, Water, and Protection.

Examples: Gaia/Terra (Greek/Roman), Isis (Egypt), and Ehlonna and Yondalla (Greyhawk).

The Green Man

The male counterpart to the mighty Great Mother is the Green Man. He is not as famous but exists in many cultures. The Green Man is often thought to be irrepressible, full of vigor and life. He represents purity, protection, the link between man and nature, and the symmetry of life. Usually the Green Man is depicted by a man's face covered in foliage, sometimes with horns.

Alignment: Neutral.

Suggested Domains: Protection, Air, Animal, Earth, Fire, Plant, and Water.

Examples: Holly Man (Celtic), Green Jack/Green George (European folklore), Obad-Hai (Greyhawk), and even Tom Bombadil (*The Lord of the Rings*).

The Trickster

A very common god is the trickster figure who makes mischief in the affairs gods and mortals alike. In the modern day, these figures have lost some of their vulgarity. The politically correct tricksters demonstrate intelligence and a sense of humor, attributes we admire in the modern day. For an example of the change in the trickster, recorders often edited American Indian stories removing lurid details such as Coyote's three wise turds, which he would consult whenever he had a problem.

Unabridged tricksters can be terrible, heartless, criminal, and outright evil. They commonly cause trouble that injures or kills people, seduce spouses into committing adultery, trick gods and men alike into making decisions they otherwise would not, and in general make everyone's life miserable.

Alignment: Always chaotic, usually neutral or evil.

Suggested Domains: Chaos, Trickery, and perhaps Evil.

Examples: Olidammara (Greyhawk), Coyote (West and Southwest American Indians), Iktomi (Lakota), Nanabozho (Ojibwa), Chulyen (Nootka/Tanaina), Saynday(Kiowa), Amaguq (Canadian Eskimo/Inuit), Cin-av-ev (Ute), Loki (Norse mythology), Brer Rabbit (West African, African-American folklore), Kaulu (Polynesian), and Qat (Banks Islands).

The Destroyer

This is a god or goddess of destruction. The most famous is the Hindu goddess Kali and her notorious followers the Thugee, from which the word "thug" is derived. The destroyer could easily be considered evil, but is given reverence by many all the same. These gods can also be associated with regeneration.

Alignment: Chaotic, usually evil.

Domains: Chaos, Death, War, and perhaps Evil.

Examples: Shiva and Kali (Hindu), Angra Mainyu (Zoroastrianism), and Erythnul (Greyhawk).

The God of Revelry

This god or goddess is devoted to having a good time and drinking liquor. These gods are quite popular, and worshipers can get very raucous. Temples to Bacchus in ancient Rome were notorious for keeping the city up all night. These gods often play important roles in mythology, however, and are not to be dismissed lightly.

Alignment: Always chaotic, usually good or neutral.

Suggested Domains: Chaos and Luck.

Examples: Bacchus/Dionysus (Greek/Roman), Ashnan (Sumerian), Maeve (Irish), Acan (Mayan), Yi-Ti (Chinese), Fufluns (Etruscan), and Olidammara (Greyhawk).

CHOOSING A HOLY SYMBOL

Although they can be quite elaborate, most religious symbols center around a circle called a mandala. Commonly, this is a closed circle or figure of some sort, or a symbol that indicates the four compass points of the circle. This includes swastikas, which are actually spiritual symbols now unfortunately forever associated with the Third Reich. Examples of mandalas include the Hindu wheel, the Judaic Star of David, the Chinese "Yin-Yang" symbol, the Mayan calendar, and the American Indian sacred circle. There are many for Greyhawk, including St. Cuthbert's cross, Pelor's face, Yondalla's shield, Fharlanghn's circle, Kord's compass rose, Boccob's pentagram, Erythunul's and Wee Jas' cameos, and even Moradin's crossed hammer and anvil. In some cases the circle is indicated but not complete, such as the Islamic or Corellon Larethian crescent or Nerull's sickle. A variation on the mandala is the mandorla, or oval shape. Again, compass points might be used. The most famous example is the Christian cross, along with Garl Glittergold's nugget, Gruumsh's eye, and the heraldic fists for Heironeous and Hextor.

God of War and Storms

Usually the god of storms in a pantheon is also the god of war. He will have power over thunderbolts and is usually a commanding figure; if not the commander of the gods he is certainly a lieutenant. This god is also prominent in the "Order from Chaos" myth below.

Alignment: Lawful.

Suggested Domains: War, Strength, Air, Law, and Destruction.

Examples: Ah Chuy Kak (Mayan), Thor (Norse), Marduk (Semetic), Karei (Andamen Islands), Nha-San (Umbandistic), Apu-Hau (Hawaii), Bmola (Abenaki), and Ishkur/Adad (Sumerian/Babylonian).

The Sun God

The sun god is responsible for making sure each day happens and that darkness is dispelled. This god is often associated with renewal and the progression of time. His symbol will include some sort of sun imagery.

Alignment: Lawful.

Suggested Domains: Law and Sun.

Examples: Apollo (Greek), Ra (Egyptian), Adaheli (Surinam), Adrammelech (Babylonian), Vahagn (Armenian), Ah Kinchil (Mayan), and Brono (Norse).

The Celestial Queen

A counterpart to the sun god is the goddess of the night who is usually represented by the moon. The celestial queen is known for being beautiful, arrogant, and haughty. She is associated with activities that occur at night, hunting, and storytelling, or with lovers. Artemis of Greek tradition is the most well known goddess of this sort.

Alignment: Lawful neutral.

Domains: Air, Knowledge, Protection, Magic, and Trickery.

Examples: Artemis (Greek), Ira (Polynesian), Anahit (Armenian), Coyolxuahqui (Aztec).

Keeper of the Dead

The god is usually a male figure that rules over the land of the dead. It should be noted that this doesn't necessitate that the god is evil. The Egyptian Osiris was well respected and loved. The god naturally invokes a certain amount of fear. This god manages a place were the dead go, particularly those souls that did not make it to Heaven (see below).

Alignment: Any.

Suggested Domains: Death, others dependent on how the god is perceived.

Examples: Osiris (Eygpt), Hades/Pluto (Greek/Roman), Hel (Norse), Aita (Etruscan), Mictlantecutli (Aztec), and Hun Came/Vucub Caquix (Mayan).

Other Deities

Each culture has deities for important aspects of their society. For example, nearly every agrarian society has a god of agriculture. Such gods might not be present in the mythology. The Greek goddess Hestia, goddess of the hearth, is mentioned only in passing in any recorded myth

THE ARCHETYPE CHECKLIST, CONTINUED.

☐ **How do the faithful pray? How does the clergy lead prayer?**

The simple definition of prayer is that is communication with the divine. The message varies on the needs and religious sophistication of the culture. Commonly, gratitude and requests for aid and guidance are the subjects of prayers. Prayers take many forms but generally include some sort of submissive posture and verbal element. Prayers are often formal, occasionally in another language, and are sometimes even sung. Prayers are not always verbal; a prayer can be written and then some ritual performed on it, such as burning the paper it was written on.

☐ **What offering, sacrifice, tithe, or tribute is offered?**

Most religions require some sort of regular offering to the divine, which is nearly always administered by the church. Offerings vary widely, ranging from livestock to money to human sacrifices. Usually, the clergy involved in the offering receives the physical remains. If the offering is money, then it goes to the church or temple. If the offering is an animal or food, then the remains become symbolic. In the Chinese Zhou dynasty, remains from sacrifices were to be placed in sacred vessels and sent to the ruling clan. For human sacrifices, the remains are significant as well. The Aztec priests were known to eat the victim afterward, believing that this act would bring them closer to their gods.

☐ **What holidays are celebrated and how?**

Many holidays seem universal, and these three should be familiar to everyone:

• **Springtide.** The most famous modern holiday for spring is Easter. Almost all religions have a spring fertility festival of some sort, on or around the vernal equinox. Rituals vary, but they always include some symbol of fertility. Examples include piglets, rabbits, eggs, and other showings of the earth's bounty. There might be some show of discipline or fasting on the part of the faithful before the festival itself.

• **Yuletide.** We all know this holiday under its modern name of Christmas, celebrated by people from many cultures. There has always been some sort of celebration around the longest night of the year: the winter solstice. The holiday is about light overcoming darkness at long last. The theme for this celebration is renewal and hope for the future. Traditions vary greatly, but a supernatural figure representing prosperity or winter is often involved. Father Winter or Frost, the Celtic Holly Man (a variant of the Green Man), and the modern Santa Claus are all examples. It is always a grand occasion that includes feasts and other celebrating.

• **Day of the Dead.** On or around the fall equinox there is a curious holiday centering on death as the nights become long. It is often believed that the dead walk the earth after dark on the Day of the Dead. Rituals involve acts to protect oneself from malicious spirits. The ancient Celts would dress and act in a frightening manner to convince spirits that they were not safe to possess. The ancient Egyptians left out food for the dead to eat. Mexico has the most interesting version of this holiday, which is a grand festival to mock and embrace death as a part of life.

There are many more holidays, but these are the most universal. Feel free to adapt interesting holidays from other faiths to your religion.

but was commonly invoked. Some religions have vast numbers of other gods, such as the Egyptian and Mayan faiths. Such gods often handle very specific jobs, such as pressing oil, making beer, or carrying moments in time upon their backs.

MYTHS

When considering the following archetypical myths, ask yourself what your campaign's version of each might be. Which deities are involved in the story, and what happens to them? In what ways does the myth affect the behavior and beliefs of the faithful?

Creation of the World

There are four basic varieties of creation myths; all creation stories fall into one or more of these categories:

- **Creation from primordial waters.** The world rises from some primordial sea by the actions of a creating god. Examples: Egyptian and Japanese creation myths.
- **The Divine Egg.** A shell that was filled with the raw elements of creation, split apart by some divine force. Examples: Yoruban, Chinese, and an alternate Greek myth.
- **Ex Nihilio.** Creation from nothingness, usually by a god speaking a word or thinking a thought. Examples: Egyptian (Pyramid texts), Indian, and Samoan.
- **The Divine Body.** The idea of this myth is that all of creation comes from the body of a divine being, often being torn asunder to make the world. Examples: Norse, Babylonian, and Chinese.

Note that cultures can often have more than one creation myth. This is true of both the Greeks and the Egyptians. Creation myths often have stages to them, as the primordial world becomes more and more defined into the world we know today.

Creation of Man

These myths come in three different varieties:

- **Man from earth.** Man is made of some element of the earth, such as soil, mud, wood, stones and so on. Examples: Yoruban, Norse, and Inca myths. Moradin's story, who forges the first dwarves out of metal and gems, is a myth of this kind.
- **Gods Mating.** The second variety is that man comes from the mating of two gods. Examples: Hindu and Pawnee myths.
- **The Divine Body.** Finally, man might come from some part of the god himself, such as tears or flesh. Examples: Egyptian and Mayan myths.

Order from Chaos

Often called the cosmogonical myth, it involves the defeat of chaos and the rise of order. The principal in this myth is the god of war and storms. This god engages in a battle, often with other gods or with a primordial creature who represents chaos. This battle usually occurs in a sea or river and ends with the god striking the mythic enemy down. Examples: Thor battling the Midgard serpent (Norse), Marduk's defeat of the dragon Tiamat (Sumerian), Zeus and the Titans (Greek), and the story of Leviathan (Book of Job).

Divine Origin of Fire

Fire is always seen as being divine in origin and a myth always centers on how fire came to men. Often some divine figure that is sympathetic to man, such as the Grecian story of Prometheus or some American Indian stories of Coyote, steals fire for mortals to use. In some cases there is revenge, punishment, or threat visited upon the thief for stealing fire. Fire worship is common in many religions, and it is often used in worship ceremonies. Examples: Prometheus (Greek), Coyote (Karuk), and Maui (Polynesia).

The Flood

Perhaps the most famous of universal myths is the flood myth, although it is often absent in cultures that do not border a body of water or a river. Overall, flood myths portray the flood being caused by humans becoming rebellious, restless, or heinous. There are notable exceptions though, including the Sumerian and Algonquin myths. In nearly all cases, one man is warned ahead of time and is given some means of survival. Finally, after the flood, people settle down and live properly, worshiping the gods and fathering the human race as we know it. Examples: Noah (Book of Genesis), Neshanu (Arapaho), Hathor (Egypt), Michabo (Algonquin), Deucalion (Greek), and Upnapishtim (Sumerian).

Heaven

Religions handle the afterlife in different ways. Reincarnation, for example, is an interesting concept of soul progression. More common, though, is the idea that there is a paradise for the worthy to be taken to in the afterlife. Mortals must prove their worth by their deeds on earth. What constitutes worth depends on what the culture values most. Sometimes it is bravery and valor, other times it is discipline and faith. Examples: Heaven (Christianity), Mag Mell (Celtic), the Elysian Fields (Greek), and Anduran (Sumerian).

Ages of Man

Versions vary a bit, but there is an underlining structure in mythologies of humans initially living in a perfect state without having to work or toil, but then falling from this state into progressive ages in which they must work hard in order to make a living. These structures can be simple, such as the expulsion from Eden in the Bible, to complex, like the multiple ages of Indian and Greek myths. Examples: Greek, Hindu, and Norse myths.

The Apocalypse

Many religions give a precise description of events that will precede the end of existence as we know it. Descriptions of these events differ wildly, but they always include the departure of virtue; the appearance of supernatural forces upon the earth; widespread disasters such as plagues, wars, and great storms; and then a creation of some new world or age for humanity to live in. Examples: The biblical Apocalypse, the Norse Ragnorak, and the End of the Ages in Indian religion

A Final Note

With a little effort you can create religions with a very realistic feel. Instead of thinking of gods as really high-level characters or monsters, your players might start thinking about their PCs' relationship with the gods. You can use religion in your storylines as well. Have important NPCs make decisions based on religious beliefs and concepts. With some creativity and a little knowledge of real-world religions, you can create a rewarding mythology for your campaign.

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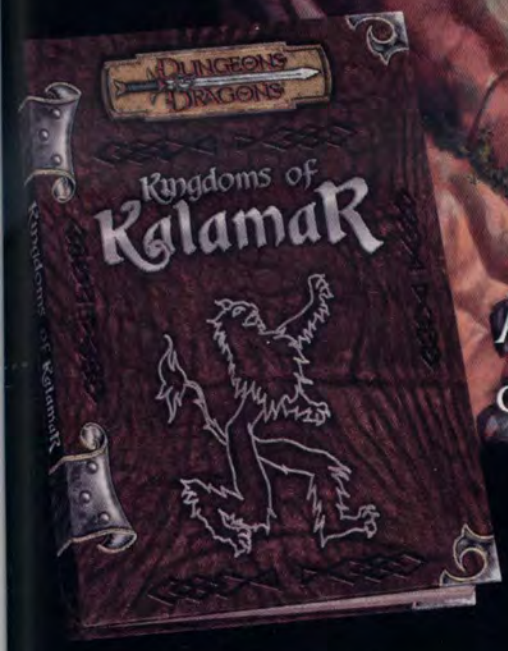

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THE D&D PLAYER'S

MOVIE MARATHON

by Mike Selinker and Stan! • illustrated by Stan!

Mike: You've gathered at Bob's house for the weekly dusk-till-dawn D&D game. Kathy brought the Mountain Dew, and Vinnie brought the requisite ten bags of Chee-Tos.

Trouble is, you forgot the dice. And the books, the minis, the character sheets . . . Faced with being Chee-Toed to death, you stammer out, "Um, how 'bout a movie?"

Good save. But now you must figure out which movie your group might like in place of their D&D game. Sure, you can rent *Dungeons & Dragons: The Movie*, which has elves, dragons, wizards, and everything this side of attacks of opportunity. But you'll need more than one movie, since your group planned to play till dawn.

Stan! and I have compiled a debatably definitive list of the movies your D&D group should rent. Of course, we're friends, so we disagree all the time. We'll each introduce a few genres, offer our own lists of best and worst fantasy films, and have at least one controversial argument that could result in the removal of someone's head.

Sword and Sorcery

Stan!: Let's start with the most obvious category: movies that could have popped out of a D&D campaign—ones with magic, monsters, enchanted blades, and all that good stuff. There are a lot out there, so we'll just stick to the best . . . and the worst.

There's nothing like any Ray Harryhausen movie to get me in the mood for D&D. ***Jason and the Argonauts, The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad, Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger, The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*** . . . it just doesn't matter. They're the best adventuring party movies ever made. Of course, even the master of stop-motion animation did some stinkers. ***Valley of Gwangi*** is a silly little flick about cowboys finding a tyrannosaur in the Mexican badlands. Stay away from ***Clash of the Titans***—I know Laurence Olivier and Harry Hamlin wished they had.

Hong Kong is still the biggest secret in fantasy films (though more people find out every day). Start with the ***Chinese Ghost Story*** series (I recommend #3) and then ***The Bride With White Hair*** or ***Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain.*** See them in their original language with subtitles—dubbing never helps a movie. Trust me.

R.E. Howard's ***Conan the Barbarian*** is the first name in sword and sorcery, and well worth your time. It's a good film, but it really doesn't capture the feel of D&D. I know I might be branded a heretic for saying it, but the far inferior ***Conan the Destroyer*** makes a much better D&D flick (though you'll have to put up with Grace Jones's growling and glaring). But for goodness sake, don't watch ***Red Sonja***, even on a dare. Brigitte Nielsen helps Arnold put the final red nails in Conan's coffin.

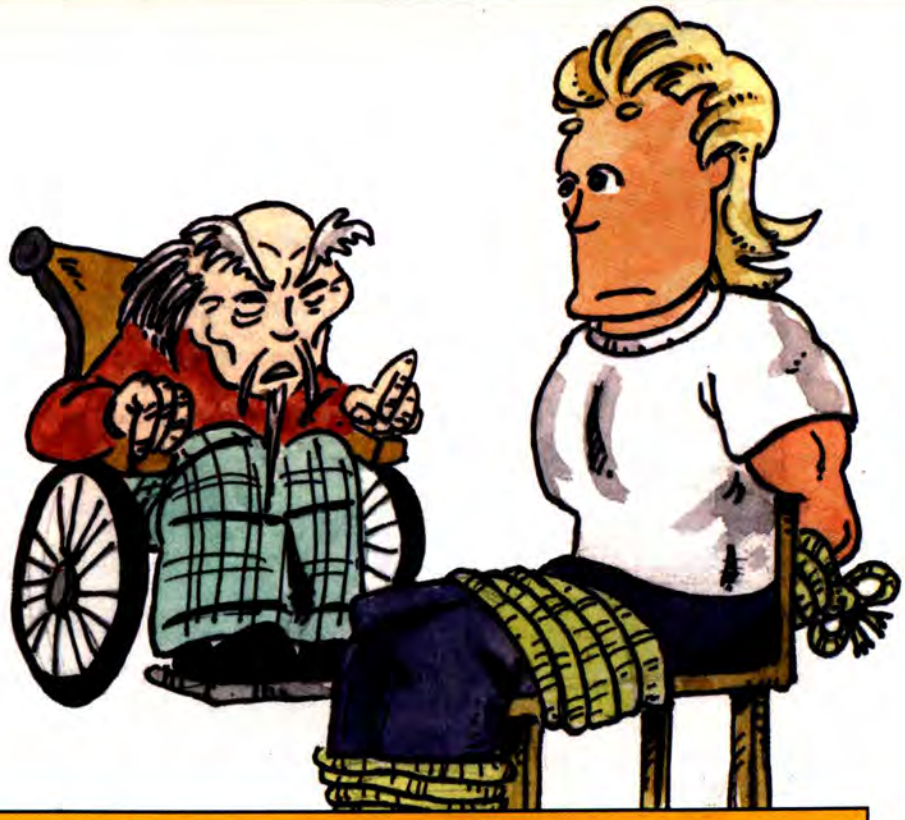
Ladyhawke is probably the best-loved fantasy adventure of the 1980s. But the Alan Parsons soundtrack and Matthew Broderick's anachronistic dialogue keep me from enjoying it as much as I might. Actually, I prefer Ridley Scott's ***Legend.*** The story is less engaging, but I just can't resist Tim Curry as Darkness—he's just so evil! ***Willow*** is another solid '80s fantasy flick, but Ron Howard

tried to cram too big a world into a mass-market movie.

A whole slew of movies tried real hard but just didn't make it. I remember thinking ***Krull*** was the best D&D movie ever when it came out. After watching it again, I can only think it must've been the Jr. Mints-induced sugar high that made it seem so good. ***The Dark Crystal*** created a wonderfully bizarre world but could never get away from the fact that the main character was clearly a muppet. ***Labyrinth*** was stylish, but even a young Jennifer Connelly couldn't make me pay close enough attention to keep up with the psychobabble. The forgettable ***Dragonslayer*** stars the improbable Peter MacNicol as a nebbish sorcerer trying to kill a great dragon. ***The NeverEnding Story*** went on interminably, and while it insisted that fluffy creature was a "luck dragon," it sure looked like a puppy to me!

Oddly enough, ***Masters of the Universe*** almost made Dolph Lundgren's He-Man a viable character, and Frank Langella rocked as Skeletor. ***Dragonheart*** was a cute idea, but that was the problem—it was too cute. Sean Connery does a great dragon voice for DMs with a flair for mimicry.

Recently a lot of traditional fantasy showed up on the small screen. I know they're full of anachronisms, but the ***Hercules*** and ***Xena*** TV series were perfect fodder for DMs looking for poachable plots. But all of the Robert Halmi, Sr. miniseries (***Merlin, The Odyssey,*** and ***The 10th Kingdom***) should be avoided. To be fair, all have brief moments of brilliance hidden within 8-plus hours of banal storytelling, but I wouldn't want to sit through them again.



"You were not brought upon this world to 'get it.'"
—Big Trouble In Little China

Sword, No Sorcery

Mike: I don't envy Stan! the last section. Let's face it, most sword and sorcery movies blow. But give a guy a sword, drop the dragons, and you've got a shot at a decent flick.

The best medieval epic is ***Braveheart***, Mel Gibson's biopic of Scottish dissident William Wallace. Made up in blue woad, Gibson will inspire your players to heroism or die trying. Liam Neeson's ***Rob Roy,*** another highlander epic, is just about as good.

The similarly stirring ***Gladiator*** features Russell Crowe as a slave/general in Rome. If that snags you, hit the source: When they see Kirk Douglas in ***Spartacus***, your players will all say, "No, I'm Spartacus!" The Charlton Heston blockbuster ***Ben-Hur*** is a bit stiff, so flip to the chariot race, the most thrilling chase scene ever filmed.

Akira Kurosawa was the last century's master of sword-slinging epics. The ***Seven Samurai*** (remade as ***The Magnificent Seven***) and ***The Hidden Fortress*** (remade as ***Star Wars***) are good doorways to his medieval Japan. Both star Toshiro Mifune, De Niro to Kurosawa's Scorsese. Later, try the thief-cum-warlord stories ***Kagemusha*** and ***Rashomon***, a look at a crime from four divergent views. (If you've got nine hours to kill, ***Shogun*** shows feudal Japan on the wane, also starring Mifune in James Clavell's story of the first western Samurai lord.)

In Ang Lee's surprise hit ***Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon***, the forces of good and evil battle for the troubled heart of a prodigious swordswoman. The Mandarin thriller's principals clash on rooftops and treetops with a grace unparalleled in film.

In ***The 13th Warrior***, a sleeper based on Michael Chrichton's *Eaters of the Dead*, Antonio Banderas plays a poet among barbarians (watch for the scene where he learns their language). Meditation and violence also permeate ***The Name of the Rose.*** Sean Connery stalks a killer in an Italian monastery, a trés cool site for an adventure.

Any Errol Flynn or Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. period piece should get your players cheering. In his first film, Flynn is physician-turned-buccaneer ***Captain Blood***, in the best swashbuckling movie ever made. The second best is ***The Prisoner of Zenda***, with Fairbanks imitating a kidnapped king. These two made a dozen classics, as did Douglas Sr. in silents like ***The Mark of Zorro.*** Tyrone Power also played the comic-strip swordsman in a flashy 1940 remake, as did Antonio Banderas in ***The Mask of Zorro.***

"My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."
—The Princess Bride

Joker Danny Kaye upends the Robin Hood myth as ***The Court Jester***, a

ROLL OF FILM

What're you gonna watch tonight?

Pick either Mike or Stan!'s list, then roll a d20. Trust us, this time you definitely don't want to roll low.

Mike's 10 Worst List

1. *Highlander.* The most overrated fantasy film of all time. It's worse than some of those that follow, because it reaches so high and fails so utterly. Stan! and I face off over this on page 66.
2. *Dungeonmaster.* Seven talentless directors cobbled together this D&D-inspired tomb of horrors starring Richard Moll (Bull from "Night Court") as a demonic goon who victimizes a computer geek. Avoid at all costs.
3. *Conquest.* Stan! and I watched this in abject horror. If you dare, check out my synopsis on page 67.
4. *Clash of the Titans.* Despite creating classics of the genre (see right), claymator Ray Harryhausen torched his reputation in this somnambulant retelling of Greek myth. Gets bonus negative points for casting Shakespearean legends Sir Laurence Olivier and Dame Maggie Smith opposite a talking robotic owl.
5. *Merlin and the Sword.* Despite competition like the Gere-Connery debacle ***First Knight,*** Arthurian legend never fared as badly on screen as in this Bad Movie Night favorite. Candice Bergen's Morgan Le Fay fright wig steals the show.
6. Cheech and Chong's *The Corsican Brothers.* The unfunniest of an unfunny series. In the Dumas novel, when one swashbuckler brother gets hurt, the other feels his pain. In this drug-fueled mockery, only the audience gets hurt.
7. *Legend.* Ugh. A low point in the careers of Tom Cruise and director Ridley Scott, and Tim Curry's goofiest makeup (making Dr. Frank N. Furter look like GQ material). Even worse than ***Willow,*** because at least Ron Howard didn't make his movie about unicornicide.
8. *Deathstalker.* It's hard to pick just one Lana Clarkson bowser for this list, since her ***Barbarian Queen*** is just about as disastrous. I picked the Argentinean-filmed ***Deathstalker*** because this brainless slice of barbariana was also marketed under the Spanish title ***El Cazador de la Muerte.*** I just like saying that.
9. Ralph Bakshi's *Wizards.* At least Bakshi's ***Lord of the Rings*** had a decent plot. This elves-vs.-Hitler (yes, you read that right) pseudo-epic can't even boast that. When the Nazi-summoning movie projector gets smashed, you'll wish it was your own.
10. *Conan the Destroyer.* Arnold throws away the franchise in this limp sequel, unably assisted by Grace Jones and late basketball icon Wilt Chamberlain. Stick with the original.

Mike's 10 Best List

11. *Ladyhawke.* A rogue (Matthew Broderick) is caught between a cursed knight and his lady love (Rutger Hauer and Michelle Pfieffer). Surprisingly involving.
12. *Jabberwocky.* You knew one Python film had to make this list, but not the funny but disjointed ***Monty Python and the Holy Grail.*** ***Jabberwocky*** features Michael Palin as an unwilling dragon hunter for King Bruno the Questionable. Tragically funny.
13. *Henry V.* Kenneth Branagh makes the most stirring speech ever written ("We few, we happy few . . ."), a showpiece in this 1989 remorseful tale of war.
14. *The Seventh Golden Voyage of Sinbad and The Eye of the Tiger.* Okay, that's three separate films, but they all blend together in my mind. Nonetheless, Ray Harryhausen creates awe-inspiring battles between man and monster in all three. See them all.
15. *Excalibur.* The only good Round Table film. This ultraviolent, visionary tale of Arthur features sensational battles, emotional tapestries, a powerful score, and most importantly, great acting.
16. *The Princess Bride.* William Goldman's brilliant book becomes the most quoted fantasy movie ever. Rob Reiner gets great scenes out of Cary Elwes, Wallace Shawn, Andre the Giant, and a dozen other stars. Prepare to die laughing.
17. *The Seven Samurai.* This list could easily be filled with Kurosawa epics: ***Ran, Rashomon, Throne of Blood.*** ***The Seven Samurai*** gets the nod because of the great D&D hook: A party of adventurers guards a terrified town from evil warlords.
18. *Army of Darkness.* Bruce Campbell, a chainsaw, and a skeletal horde unite to make a scathing fantasy satire. Contains the best scene to show players who can't remember command words for their magic items ("Klaatu barada nnnh-hmmm!").
19. *Fantasia.* My favorite movie, even after three dozen viewings. Sweeping fantasy landscapes set against the greatest score of all time. Check out the three-DVD set with ***Fantasia 2000*** and over one hundred making-of featurettes.
20. *Conan the Barbarian.* The one true fantasy classic. Backed by a Basil Poledouris score, a perfectly cast Arnold Schwarzenegger towers above all other action heroes. It's so solid a D&D movie that despite two complaints (Conan's hair should be black, and he'd never throw his sword), Gary Gygax praised it in these pages two decades ago. You can't get a better recommendation than that.

good-hearted brigand protecting a royal infant. Its tongue-twisting poison cup scene ("The pellet with the poison's in the vessel with the pestle . . .") resurfaces three decades later in ***The Princess Bride***, the funniest swashbuckling parody on screen. Close behind is ***Royal Flash***, with Malcolm McDowell as the Flashman, George Macdonald Fraser's cowardly duelist. Someday, someone will say "sa-ha!" and film Fraser's best satire, *The Pyrates*. Till then, piratic parody fans can settle for ***Erik the Viking*** and ***Yellowbeard***, Monty Python leftovers with some giggles but hardly an Inigo Montoya.

For adventure without distracting dialogue, there's always prehistoric action. Raquel Welch bedecks Ray Harryhausen's dino-slugfest ***One Million Years B.C.***, which is to paleontology what ***Planet of the Apes*** is to evolutionism. A "realistic" approach shackles ***The Clan of the Cave Bear*** and ***Quest For Fire***, with out-of-place heroines Daryl Hannah and Rae Dawn Chong. Me, I'll take Raquel over realism any day.

Cartoons

Stan!: We all know cartoons aren't just for kids, Saturday morning, or cloying theme parks anymore. Once you delve into the history of animation you find an untapped wealth of stories and characters to plunder for your home campaigns.

Let's start with the classics, and I do mean classics—Walt Disney's ***Fantasia*** blends classical music and myth with perhaps the best animation the Mouse's studios ever produced. While we're talking about Disney, ***Peter Pan*** may be for the kiddies, but Neverland makes a terrific setting for roleplaying. You'll find little of value in ***Sword in the Stone***, Disney's adaptation of the King Arthur story, or ***The Black Cauldron***.

I have a personal preference for Japanese anime, but most anime needs a lot of interpretation before bringing it to your D&D games. ***Princess Mononoke***, last year's hit import, has an all-star cast of voice actors and English screenplay by Neil Gaiman. It's not just one of the best animated fantasy films—it's one of the best all around. Of course, you really can't go wrong with any of director Hayao Miyazaki's works. From the post-apocalyptic ***Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind***, through the light-hearted ***Laputa: Castle in the Sky***, and on to the Harry Potter-esque ***Kiki's Delivery Service***, Miyazaki always delivers fantastic settings and entrancing stories. If you want something really in a D&D vein, try ***Record of Lodoss War***, a fantasy television series that purportedly was based off the writer's D&D campaign. Other anime ripe for adaptation include ***Slayers***, ***Ninja Scroll***, and ***Vampire Hunter D***.

Ralph Bakshi offers us three potentially classic, but ultimately forgettable, entries. First is ***Wizards***. It has a few inventive interpretations of classic creatures, but eventually grinds down into Bakshi's personal brand of semi-comprehensible moralizing. We're supposed to learn here that war is bad—but in the end, so is the movie. Likewise, try to forget ***Fire & Ice*** (you won't have to work hard), Bakshi's collaboration with painter Frank Frazetta. Finally, Bakshi is also responsible for the disastrous ***Lord of the Rings*** cartoon, whose only saving grace is that it's nowhere near as bad as the Rankin/Bass sequel ***The Return of the King***. Who'd have thought that the studio that did such a wondrous job with ***The Hobbit*** would fall down so completely?

Heavy Metal is a cult classic based on stories from the magazine of the same name. However, it offers very little beyond a great soundtrack. Buy the CD, leave the movie for midnight showings.

Finally, if you can find it, the early-'80s ***Dungeons & Dragons*** cartoon will give your players a laugh, though they'll want to beat the heck out of Uni the Unicorn.

The Classics

Mike: You can only get so far with new material. Mining literary greats should produce a higher rate of return. Or so you'd think. Malory's *Le Mort d'Arthur* begat far more celluloid stinkers than gems. Of the Arthurian films, only ***Excalibur*** and ***Monty Python and the Holy Grail*** have legit credentials as classics. More typical are the Gere-as-Lancelot snoozer ***First Knight*** and the histrionic musical ***Camelot***. (Twain's fish-out-of-water tale *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* got a few okay film treatments, though.)

"It's only a flesh wound."
–Monty Python and the Holy Grail

Alexandre Dumas gets equally mixed results. Several takes on *The Three Musketeers* are smashing, those with Fairbanks, Sr., Gene Kelly, and best of all, Oliver Reed sticking it to Cardinal Richelieu in Richard Lester's ribald 1974 film. But the 1993 Oliver Platt version (keep your Olivers straight) is as addle-headed as Reed's is witty. Fairbanks, Jr. ably plays both of Dumas's ***The Corsican Brothers***—no, not the Cheech and Chong travesty. Beyond Fairbanks Sr.'s ***The Iron Mask***, Dumas doesn't fare well with *The Man in the Iron Mask*, especially the Leonardo DiCaprio clunker. Robert Donat is much more inspiring as Dumas's vengeful rogue ***The Count of Monte Cristo***.

"To crush your enemies, to see them driven before you, and to hear the lamentations of their women."
–Conan the Barbarian

SECOND VERSE

Same as the First.

Roll d20 and pray for a high number.

Stan's 10 Worst List

1. *Conquest*. This is the worst movie ever made. I can't believe I sat through the whole thing! It's worse than you can know. Save yourselves! Some movies man was not meant to view!
2. *Highlander 2*. There should have been only one!
3. *Flesh & Blood*. Rutger Hauer takes Jennifer Jason Leigh hostage then just waits for everyone in the film to die of the plague. This yawner keeps threatening to turn into a medieval version of ***Pulp Fiction***, but in the end it just rolls over and dies too.
4. *The NeverEnding Story*. Despite decent special effects and a solid premise, this "realization of self" movie just plods on as tediously as the name might imply.
5. *Excalibur*. Arthurian cinema verite. Not a bad movie, but boy is it slow. I'd hate to play in a D&D game paced like this film. I saw it once and I'm glad, but I have no plans to ever watch it again.
6. *The Return of the King*. With songs like "Where There's a Whip, There's a Way," and animation I wouldn't waste on "The Smurfs," Rankin & Bass have managed to make a film worse than Bakshi's version of ***Lord of the Rings***.
7. *Fire & Ice*. Put Ralph Bakshi and Frank Frazetta together and you've got a winner, right? Wrong! Buy a book of Frazetta's paintings—you'll enjoy the visuals more, not to mention the dialog.
8. *Dragonheart*. A dragon and a knight team up to become the middle-ages' best con artists. The special effects are first rate, and Sean Connery makes a great dragon, but the story and script are cloying.
9. *Clash of the Titans*. This should have been one of the best ever. But somehow Greek gods, Sir Laurence Olivier, and the stop-motion genius of Ray Harryhausen only add up to a beautiful but unwatchable film.
10. *Red Sonja*. Mike might be right that ***Conan the Destroyer*** killed the franchise, but this movie put a stake through its heart and filled its mouth with garlic.

Stan's 10 Best List

11. *Legend*. A reluctant hero must save the last unicorn and prove that true love really does conquer all. Ridley Scott creates a stylish, frightening fantasy world, and Tim Curry plays a horned, cloven-hooved villain who is both terrifying and seductive.
12. *Army of Darkness*. Bruce Campbell and director Sam Raimi put together the best "modern man thrown back into medieval times" adventure flick ever. This one is quoted almost as often as ***The Princess Bride***.
13. *Highlander*. From the dawn of time they came, moving silently through the ages. A tale of immortal swordsmen fighting one another for a prize that could save or doom all mankind. I want all my D&D games to have this kind of style, but in the end there can be only one.
14. *Princess Mononoke*. This Hayao Miyazaki film might be an allegory about the power of faith and the dangers of deforestation, but it's also one of the best anime adventure films ever.
15. *Yojimbo*. In the name of fairness, I'll restrict myself to just one Kurosawa film. This one wins out because it shows the perfect distinction between PCs (Toshiro Mifune) and NPCs (the rest of the town), and how even though the PC wins, the NPCs get in a few good licks every now and then.
16. *The Princess Bride*. Who is the man in black? No one to be trifled with! We all wish our characters could be as glib and quick-witted as those in this Rob Reiner film.
17. *The Three Musketeers*. Richard Lester's 1974 adaptation of the Dumas classic always makes me want to swash some buckles and eat copious amounts of food. Sounds like a night around the gaming table to me!
18. *Chinese Ghost Story 3*. A beautiful ghost entreats a Buddhist acolyte to help save her soul from the demon that binds it to the mortal world. Tongue-in-cheek romantic comedy mixed with high-flying, Hong Kong kung-fu action.
19. *Jason and the Argonauts*. This entry could just as easily have been any of the classic Sinbad movies. The key is lots of action and Ray Harryhausen's animation genius. I chose this one because of the battle with the skeleton army. To this day I've never seen it done better.
20. *Braveheart*. After watching Mel Gibson's epic story of William Wallace's fight for Scotland's independence, even I want to paint my face blue and go kill the English!

The Arabian Nights has inspired 1,001 films, most just fine. The 1974 Italian film is definitely not for everyone (especially kids). Fairbanks, Sr. is great in ***The Thief of Baghdad***, as is Cornel Wilde as Aladdin in ***A Thousand and One Nights***. I enjoyed the Disney ***Aladdin***, with Robin Williams hamming it up as a blue genie.

Robin Hood has been filmed often, and often poorly. Early films with Fairbanks, Sr. and Errol Flynn (***The Adventures of Robin Hood***) are phenomenal. Later films with Kevin Costner (***Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves***) and Cary Elwes (***Robin Hood: Men in Tights***) are . . . not phenomenal. Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn survive a bad script in the geriatric ***Robin and Marian***. Even the vulpine Disney cartoon's pretty dull.

The tale that's fared best is Mme. Leprince de Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast*. Jean Cocteau's 1946 ***La Belle et la Bête*** is the best French film I've seen, set in a freaky castle replete with arrow-firing statues and human-arm candelabra sconces. Disney's cartoon adds a singing teapot, but it's still great. Even the soft-focus TV show holds up.

Some Shakespeare films your group shouldn't miss. ***Henry V*** will pump players for action, especially against long odds like Henry faced at Agincourt. Pick Kenneth Branagh or Laurence Olivier, and prepare for battle. For the best battle scenes, though, get Kurosawa's ***Ran***, his *King Lear*. (Other film Lears, such as Ian Holm and Patrick "The Prisoner" Magee, give great shouts of madness, but fewer battles.)

With witches and ghosts, *Macbeth* is D&D to the core. Orson Welles's thane is good, Kurosawa's (***Throne of Blood***) is great, but Roman Polanski's horror film is the darkest and best. Similarly, recent Mel Gibson and Branagh ***Hamlets*** shine, though Branagh adds jarring cameos from Jack Lemmon and Robin Williams. I like the Olivier standard, but pick the Dane that's for you. (I also love ***Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead***, Tom Stoppard's behind-the-scenes look at Hamlet's inept, doomed pals.)

A Midsummer's Night's Dream always comes off magically, such as in wild versions with Jimmy Cagney and Michelle Pfieffer. My favorite, the 1968 Royal Shakespeare Company version, stars a very young and very green Dame Judi Dench. Unlike *Midsummer*, *The Tempest* hasn't spawned a great fantasy film, unless you count ***Forbidden Planet***. The one with Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. as Prospero is solid, especially when Ron "Horschack" Palillo appears as a drunk sailor. I can't describe Peter Greenaway's ***Prospero's Books***, except as an acquired taste.

> ***"Once more unto the breach, my friends, once more!"***
> *–Henry V*

I can't list all the other Shakespeare gems. A few: ***Othello***, with Welles or either Laurence (Olivier or Fishburne); ***Romeo and Juliet***, the Leonardo DiCaprio update or the Zeffirelli hit (with real teenagers!); Dick and Liz clashing in ***The Taming of the Shrew;*** Brando as Brutus in ***Julius Caesar;*** Ian McKellan as ***Richard III;*** Branagh's ***Much Ado About Nothing;*** Welles's five-play Falstaff collage, ***Chimes of Freedom;*** the grotesque ***Titus;*** and the turn-of-the-last-century treasury ***Silent Shakespeare***.

Get the original dialogue, because the modernized ***Strange Brew*** (Hamlet) and ***10 Things I Hate About You*** (Shrew) might be fun, but hardly for D&D players seeking an immersive experience. (Still, I have a soft spot for Troma's ***Tromeo and Juliet***. To compare, in the DiCaprio film, Romeo comes to the Capulet party dressed as a knight. In the Troma version, Tromeo comes dressed as a cow.)

For the Kiddies

Stan!: Every once in a while movies come out that, while intended for the grade-school crowd, offer brilliant glimpses into just how fantastic fantasy films can be.

Return to Oz was more faithful to the L. Frank Baum books than ***The Wizard of Oz***, and it showed us the frightening, dangerous, and alien land over the rainbow. The rocky Nome King, Tik-Tok the clockwork man, and Belinda the talking chicken would make fine additions to any D&D game. Besides, Princess Mombi makes a freaky villain.

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang creates a comfortably familiar Bavarian-style setting that is frighteningly similar to some of the Hammer Films horror movies. Hypnotic candies, flying cars, and dark, dank dungeons fill this adaptation of the Ian Fleming (yes, that Ian Fleming) children's tale.

My favorite place to raid odd ideas from, though, are the worlds of Sid and Marty Krofft. The people who brought you ***The Land of the Lost, Dr. Shrinker,*** and ***Sigmund and the Sea Monsters*** have a lot to offer DMs. Their first creation, ***H.R. Pufnstuf***, is the richest—give your PCs a talking flute, send them to the Living Island, and just let them try to stay out of that crazy witch's way!

Big, Dumb, Goofy Fun

Mike: Most times when we recommend a movie, we're saying it's a good film. But some films are so stupid, they're hysterical.

The ultimate Bad Movie Night film is ***The Barbarians***. Musclebrained twins David and Peter Paul play lunkhead warriors Kutchek and Gor.

> ***"Where are you going?"***
> ***"To pick a fight!"***
> *–Braveheart*

The movie is awful, but whenever the twins take the screen ("Kutchek! It is I, your brudder!"), you'll bust a gut.

Hawk the Slayer might also make your playlist. This puffball has two highlights: a scene-chewing Jack Palance as the evil brother of the rock-dumb hero, and a royally cool rapid-fire bow that every arcane archer in your game will stat up on the spot.

I can't describe how bad ***Merlin and the Sword*** is. Dyan Cannon falls into a hole in Stonehenge (I know, you missed it when you were there), and sees Camelot unfold. You can't believe Malcolm McDowell could be this bad as Arthur, and then you see Candice Bergen's Morgan Le Fay frizz and you realize it's a comedy. It has to be.

The demigod Hercules defines this section's title. Those who play him invariably bring a comic book insensibility to the role: Steve "Superman" Reeves, Lou "Hulk" Ferrigno, Arnold "Conan" Schwarzenegger. I like Arnold's badly dubbed ***Hercules in New York*** (a.k.a. ***Hercules Goes Bananas***), where the son of Zeus learns humility by becoming a pro wrestler. Speaking of which, the TV Hercules, Kevin Sorbo, drops the bar even lower with ***Kull the Conqueror***, Robert E. Howard's other barbarian.

Blockbuster has a whole aisle of stupid barbarian films, but most aren't fun. I've managed to avoid ***Beastmaster, Ator the Fighting Eagle,*** and the film of John Norman's horrific Gor novels all these years. But I have suffered through ***Barbarian Queen, Deathstalker***, and most depressingly, ***Naked Warriors***. Sadly, I can't eject the portion of my brain that knows I've seen those films. Don't end up like me.

Not Fantasy, but Fantastic

Stan!: We've stayed pretty close to traditional fantasy all the way through this. But who'd argue that ***Star Wars*** or ***Raiders of the Lost Ark*** are not D&D movies at their heart? We all know the game is as much about modern adventure as it is about medieval folklore. So let's take a quick look at some films that are technically outside the fantasy genre, but well within D&D's scope.

The western setting is just like a town in your average D&D world—simply trade the shotguns for *wands of magic missile*. I've both run and played in adventures based on ***A Fistful of Dollars*** and ***For a Few Dollars More***. The four main characters in ***Silverado***

• THERE CAN BE ONLY TWO •

HIGHLANDER

One Sword Down

Mike: From the director of the giant-berserk-pig thriller *Razorback* comes *Highlander*, an overblown cult favorite whose appeal has eluded me for more than a decade. Russell Mulcahy inexplicably casts the greatest Scottish actor of his generation (Sean Connery) as an Egyptian Spaniard, and the worst French actor of his generation (Christopher Lambert) as the titular Scotsman, Connor Macleod. Both are immortals, a breed of vampires kind enough to feed on each other rather than us poor mortals.

In a story that nests flashbacks within flashbacks, the immortals chop each others' heads off with relish (which mass murderer is the hero again?). Overemotive Queen music screeches out of every radio as it all culminates in a purportedly epic "gathering," a prizefight in the greater New York-New Jersey area, except that only five guys show up. As the three extraneous immortals bite it, Macleod seduces a police scientist by having her stab him in the heart, a novel come-on to say the least. (See the far better *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* for the right way to do that scene.)

Ooh-scary Clancy Brown steals a car with an old woman bouncing on the hood (see, he's the evil one), and draws our monotone hero to him. They battle as ten-foot red letters drop on their heads (no, really), and there's some awful animation, and all I want is Dennis Weaver to show up on horseback, flash his Deputy Marshal McCloud badge and say, "That'll be enough of that there head-choppin', son."

Nice swords, though.

One Sword Up

Stan!: Mike, are you out of your mind?

There are plenty of things to make fun of in *Highlander*, as high fantasy always provides moments of high comedy when translating ancient mores into modern tales. But for goodness sake, how did this movie not get your blood pumping and fire your imagination? It's a buddy film with exotic locales, really cool swordfights, and the fate of the world hanging in the balance. The cinematography is stunning, the story is imaginative, and Brown is the villain we all want in our campaigns. I flat-out can't believe you didn't like the creative, amusing, and visually challenging scene transitions. And I keep that Queen soundtrack in my CD library for use during roleplaying sessions (as I recall, you even mentioned it as part of "The Definitive D&D Soundtrack," my friend).

Your problem, if I can be so bold, is that you look to *Highlander* for the typical Good vs. Evil conflict. It's a movie of the '80s, Mike—even "Good" has a little mud on it. Connor Macleod is a true D&D hero. He fights and kills, but he doesn't do so wantonly, and he is most interested in saving the world and getting the girl. Condemn Connor as just a "mass murderer," and you might as well sentence every PC ever rolled up right along with him.

I've come to my own conclusion about that question I asked earlier—you are out of your mind. *Highlander* might not be classic sword & sorcery, but it is one of the premier D&D films.

would make a great adventuring group, while they'd hate to see Antonio Banderas' ***Desperado*** mariachi walk into their favorite tavern. Nothing could test your PCs more than the overprotectively marshaled towns in ***Unforgiven*** and ***Tombstone***. Throw them in a town under siege, like in ***Rio Bravo, The Magnificent Seven***, or ***The Alamo***, and they'll wish the cavalry was right over the next hill. For a wartime wilderness game, you can't beat the Daniel Day-Lewis film ***The Last of the Mohicans.***

Gangster movies like ***Last Man Standing*** (based on the Kurosawa film ***Yojimbo***) and ***The Untouchables*** add a touch of grit and moral uncertainty to a campaign, as do dystopian sci-fi films like ***The Matrix, Escape from New York, The Road Warrior***, and ***Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome.***

If you're looking for fiendish traps to throw at your players, look at the stunts in just about any Jackie Chan movie. My personal favorites were brought to U.S. theaters as ***Operation Condor, Armor of God, Half a Loaf of Kung Fu***, and ***Super Cop***.

James Cameron has a couple of movies worth plundering. I've seen the "bug hunt" theme of ***Aliens*** adapted using everything from plague-carrying rats to invading tanar'ri. And in a low-magic setting, an iron golem can be turned into ***The Terminator***.

Modern horror-adventure can also be a good choice. The recent version of ***The Mummy*** might be the best adventuring party movie I've seen, with underground caverns, traps, monsters, and magic galore. The original ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** movie ought to be avoided as anything other than historical reference for the TV series, which I loot on a weekly basis.

Mike says I have to mention ***The Warriors***, which he claims is clearly a dungeon crawl set on the gang-infested streets of New York. While I'm at it, let's consider a few other off-the-wall movies. Mike hates both ***Flash Gordon*** and ***Highlander***, but I think they set the perfect mood for high-energy roleplaying. Both the mercenary little people of ***Time Bandits*** and the unbelievable ***Adventures of Baron Munchausen*** are wacky fun that can add surrealism to your game. And I know more than one party who named themselves the "Hong Kong Cavaliers" after the intrepid scientists/adventurers/rock-stars in ***The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension.***

My favorite D&D movie of all time, though, is ***Big Trouble In Little China***. I didn't include it in my top ten, just because the main character is a wise-cracking truck driver who uses an Uzi to fight a 2,000-year-old Chinese ghost (or is it a demon?). I mean, how are you going to re-create Jack Burton using the *Player's Handbook*?

THE WORST FANTASY FILM EVER

Mike: When someone says a film is bad, part of your brain wants to find out just how bad it could be. In regards to ***Conquest***, we can only say: Please trust us.

To say that this Italian-Spanish-Mexican film is incomprehensible ignores the fact that we could comprehend bits of it, despite our wishes. We get two barbarian heroes—and you know they're heroes because one takes a magic bow and shoots a helpless old man, who dies slowly and painfully, and then our heroes steal his food.

Anyhow, there's this nearly naked woman in a gold mask who wants our heroes dead, but her rubber-masked hyena warriors botch the job, so she summons a demon made of mirrors, who . . . Heck, I'm making this mess make too much sense. We sat there in disbelief, seriously debating clawing out our own eyes. But if we did, we couldn't write this article and warn others.

Stan!'s burying his head in his hands again. Just don't ever see ***Conquest***.

The Future

Mike: You'd think all the flicks we just mentioned would fill the marquee at the D&D Googolplex, but this year might just blow it all away. The lavish video game ***Final Fantasy*** comes to the screen this summer. And then two literary blockbusters square off on screen, ***The Lord of the Rings*** and ***Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone***. These should give Stan! and me something to argue about for years to come.

So until next time, the battlement is closed.

"Listen up, you primitive screw-heads! This is my boom-stick!"
—Army of Darkness

Many players love it when DMs hand them their marching orders. If the name of the game is monster-slaying or treasure-gathering, they figure that nosing around in search of their own adventures just wastes precious hacking time. There's something to be said for the simplicity of this approach; it makes things easier on both DMs and players.

Not everyone, however, shares this taste for the straightforward. If you get your enjoyment from creating a detailed character and playing her consistently, you might have trouble with a DM's one-size-fits-all plot hooks. You care about your character's motivations; as far as you're concerned, reasons for risking your life are not interchangeable. Your devotion to this style of play is so great that you'd rather opt out of an adventure than have your character behave in a way that ruins your belief in her.

MY CHARACTER *WOULD* DO THAT!

Making Unappetizing Plot Hooks Work for You

by Robin D. Laws • illustrated by Michael Kaluta

Our gaming lives would be simple if we could all organize our gaming groups by taste. If the people who like clear plot hooks could all get together on Fridays, and the ones who like to pick and choose their adventures on Saturdays, the question wouldn't require much thought. In the real world, most groups reflect a range of tastes. We tend to get together with our friends, depending on who's available. Almost every group splits between the cut-to-the-chasers and the what's-my-motivation crowd.

If you're in the latter group, you might find yourself in a box when the DM presents a plot hook that doesn't fit your character. Your immediate reaction when faced with a hook that makes no sense to you is probably to proclaim, "My character wouldn't do that!" While it's an honest response, keep in mind that these are the four words that DMs and fellow players most fear. You'll face pressure from your fellow players to go along with the flow. It's not fair to you for them to expect you to ignore the reason you game in the first place, but it's equally unfair of you to delay or sidetrack everyone else's fun.

REMAKING A PLOT HOOK IN THREE EASY STEPS

The trick is to meet the DM halfway and, working together, add details to the situation that allow your PC to happily join the adventure he's planned. When you run up against this situation, remember these simple steps:

1. **Establish Communication**
2. **Suggest Alternatives**
3. **Find Compromises**

Establishing Communication

When you intensely identify with your PC, it's easy to forget that the DM and other players are probably perceiving only a tiny fraction of the character you know. You probably created, perhaps in your head but more likely on paper, a several-page account of her personality, appearance, and past history. All of it is vividly burned into your imagination, because you're the one who created it. While it makes perfect sense to you that your character wouldn't want to go back down to the Underdark when there are Black Iris cultists still active in the ducal court, your rejection of the offered plot hook probably comes as a big surprise to the others. They see what your character does but don't necessarily understand the reasons behind her actions. You might have handed your backstory around soon after you first created the character. Your DM likely read it but has forgotten many of the details. Chances are that at least some of your fellow players thanked you for it, tucked it away in their binders, and haven't looked at it since. The very fact that the DM is presenting you with an adventure you find utterly contrary to your character's plans serves as a good indication that you haven't made them obvious or memorable.

The first step toward clearing up this clash of assumptions is to make your character's viewpoint obvious to everyone. Don't be reluctant to come right out and explain it. Granted, it isn't realistic for the other PCs to enjoy access to your character's innermost thoughts. So ask them to separate player knowledge from character knowledge, just as they do with many other aspects of a typical D&D game. The more detail you give to the others when explaining why a plot hook doesn't work for you, the less likely they are to write off your objections as mere scene-stealing, and the better equipped they'll be to help suggest alternatives and find compromises. Hey, if making direct statements about a characters' personalities and thinking was good enough for Charles Dickens, it's good enough for us.

Suggesting Alternatives

Laying out the precise reasons for the character's refusal to follow a plot hook is more than just a matter of helping the other players see that you're not just raining on the parade. By articulating it out loud, you're also making the problem clearer to yourself. As you talk, you might see that your first-blush objections to the evening's storyline aren't as insurmountable as you thought. You might even find yourself answering your own objections and concluding with a hearty "never mind!"

Let's assume that the problem is deeper than that. You really can't think why, given the information the DM has given you, you'd head for dungeon X instead of pursuing city plotline Y. The solution lies in altering the information the DM has provided. This, of course, requires the approval of the DM, who is the final arbiter of everything that goes on in his world. Here's where a little diplomacy goes a long way. Make sure your suggestions sound like precisely that, not like commandments or ransom demands. In this situation, the word "if" is your best friend:

"Coridon would be interested in the dungeon only if he thought it would help her topple the kobold king."

"What if Aenen found out that people in cultist's robes had been seen nearby?"

"What if Perdil's superiors in the order came to him and explained how going down there wouldn't actually contradict his vows to Heironeous?"

Here you're using a basic principle that will serve you in good stead in any negotiation. Instead of crossing your arms and telling the other party (in this case, the DM) that she has to solve the problem for you, you're starting the ball rolling by proposing a possible solution.

Finding Compromises

If the DM accepts your suggestions outright, there is no need to compromise. If not, you need to modify your ideas further.

There are two kinds of compromise: compromise with the DM and compromise with your own conception of the character.

Negotiating With Your DM

Having floated a proposal, prepare to be receptive to the DM's counter-proposals. It's his world, after all. Your ideas might contradict facts he needs to make the current storyline work. He might also want to protect a future plotline. Because he needs to preserve his adventure's secrets and surprises, he might not be able to come right out and tell you why your proposal won't work. If he says, "No, sorry, that's not how it is," you have to be ready to think of something else.

Ideally, your DM will try as hard as you do to make the adventure hook appeal to your character. Your idea might not work as initially stated, but, since he knows more about the secrets of the setting than you do, he might be able to change your concept to fit your PC's plans.

Negotiating With Your Character

Flexibility goes both ways. If you expect your DM to adjust the set-up of the adventure, you should be prepared to modify your character's objections at least slightly. In real life, very few of us are utterly intransigent when faced with a difficult situation. Often we find ourselves pulled in two directions at once. Your character probably has more than one driving goal or personality trait. Try to find reasons why her secondary aims might cause her to temporarily set aside a major goal.

Personal loyalty is always a reliable fallback motivation. Your PC belongs to an adventuring party. She's risked her life for them, and they've done the same for her. If her friends choose to participate in a particular mission, she might feel an obligation to help them. Her friendship toward them, and her desire to see them survive to fight alongside her another day, trump her misgivings over the nature of the mission. Even if she's the cold and calculating type, she might recognize that she must occasionally sacrifice her own priorities to obligate her allies to her. That way, when she runs across a mission she passionately wants to undertake, she can cajole reluctant party members by reminding them of the time she ignored her better judgment to support them.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

Having covered general ways of dealing with motivational roadblocks, it's time to look in detail at some typical reasons

EXAMPLE

Here's an example of the process of proposal and counter-proposal.

YOU Tarkak would never join the Duke's regiment. He's a rogue and hates all authority, especially the mindless discipline of an army barracks. Suffer through drills? Follow orders? No way!

DM Well, I worked on this adventure all week, and it depends on your going undercover in the regiment to find out who's been smuggling adamantine swords to the hobgoblin raiders.

YOU Tarkak knows that it's bad for the hobgoblins to have adamantine swords, but he knows he can't impersonate a soldier. He'll end up in the stockade for sure. Okay, how about this? Tarkak will go if the Duke tells the commander and the sergeant-at-arms to take it easy on him and not give him any mortifying orders.

DM [Knowing that the sergeant-at-arms is the culprit] The Duke can't do that; the traitor could be anyone. No one can know you really answer to him.

YOU Okay, then, is there any other way for Tarkak to be assigned to the camp without having to pose as a regular soldier? What if he pretends to be a wilderness scout or something?

The DM looks at the sourcebook he's using, which specifies in detail the command structure of the ducal regiment. It says that even scouts serve under the direct authority of the sergeant-at-arms. But, while the supplement writer might have cared about this detail, the DM doesn't. It makes no difference to his adventure or future plans. He hasn't described the regiment in his game before, so he's free to alter details without contradicting anything he's already established as true for his world. He decides to depart from the source material, making a note to that effect in the margins of the supplement.

DM All right, the regiment does have a tradition of hiring irregulars to serve as scouts. They're often free-spirited ranger types who want to sleep under the stars and go out on patrol as the urge strikes them. You'll be able to wander around inside the garrison without suspicion. But posing as a scout has disadvantages: You'll be point man on every patrol you go on, and there are places in the encampment where your presence will seem suspicious.

YOU That's fine by me. As long as he doesn't have to scrub latrines or get up early in the morning, the mission doesn't contravene Tarkak's basic principles. And he's impersonated stranger things than rangers.

why you might reject a plot hook and suggest ways around it.

Tactical

A tactical objection is one in which you agree with the goal of the mission but don't think that the plan you've been given will work.

- The party is expected to sneak into a powerful wizard's mansion, which is known to be bristling with exceedingly lethal traps. Your party's rogue just bit the dust. In your view, that makes the adventure a suicide mission.
- The adventure assumes that the party will journey through a monster-infested swamp to meet a blackmailer, who will turn over a document embarrassing to your patron in exchange for a sack of gold. You expect the blackmailer to simply ambush you, take the gold, claim that monsters ate you, and proceed to extort another bulging purse from your employer.
- The adventure calls on the party to act as bodyguard to a disreputable character. You're sure the DM plans for him to betray you, probably framing you for one of his misdeeds.

Whenever you feel like balking at a plot hook for tactical reasons, one of two possible situations holds: Either you're overestimating the dangers, or your DM is deliberately leading you toward failure. Here you need to engage the DM, probably in his guise as the NPC doling out the assignment, in further discussion, to help you decide which is the case.

Players sometimes get too leery of risk at the beginning of an adventure. They forget that D&D is a game of outrageous heroism, where the cards are stacked in favor of the bold and audacious. Adventure stories are about heroes who get into terrible-seeming trouble but then use their brains and brawn to escape impending doom. Do you perceive the tactical problem because you're thinking in real-world logic? If so, take a deep breath and rely on the DM to hit you with challenges you have a fair chance of overcoming.

On the other hand, DMs sometimes succumb to the temptations of the idiot plot, in which the PCs are meant to walk into a bad situation and get clobbered, leading to the real premise of the adventure. Even here, the DM will probably make things right in the end, giving you a way out of the problems he creates for you. Nonetheless, you don't have to play stupid just because the plot demands it. Taking foolish decisions for plot reasons makes your character seem implausible and ruins your respect for her. A set-up that requires the PCs to do this is one the DM should prepare to see rejected. It's never pleasant to make a DM toss aside an adventure he's spent time and thought on, but if you're certain he means to lead you like sheep to the slaughter, you're within your rights to do it. Next time he'll learn to present you with a set-up that's more fair.

Keep in mind, though, that it's much more likely that you're exaggerating the risks. Give the DM the benefit of the doubt until he proves otherwise by laying an idiot plot on you.

Clashing Priorities

One of the most common reasons for rejecting a hook is not that there's anything wrong with it, in and of itself, but that other matters seem more pressing to you. This situation comes up only in a campaign that's been running for a while, and in which there are unresolved plot threads still lying around.

- The DM wants you to attend a jousting tournament, but you haven't finished clearing out the dungeon level you've been working on, and you're sure a major magic item still awaits you down there.
- The main villain from the last adventure escaped. At the end of last week's session, you swore that you wouldn't rest until he was brought to justice. You want to pursue him, even though the new adventure seems to be about skullduggery at the opera house.
- Your magic sword has started talking to you, claiming that it's the imprisoned spirit of a great elven warrior. You want to go to his tomb to investigate the sword's claims and don't care about the DM's adventure, a bandit-suppression mission.

For a DM, one of the unexpected side-effects of creating a campaign with enough depth that PCs develop goals of their own is that, well, PCs develop goals of their own. This makes the game seem rich and vivid, but it's hard to anticipate which plot threads the players will invest with meaning and which ones they'll leave dangling. It becomes especially troublesome when players differ on which threads to pursue. Even when the group seems to want to go in a particular direction at the end of one session, they might surprise the DM by heading elsewhere at the beginning of the next.

If your DM is good at improvising, and

everybody wants to do the same thing, clashing priorities are not a problem.

If the DM improvises skillfully, but the players want to pursue mutually exclusive plot threads, you need to negotiate with one another. Try to reach an agreement on which possible storyline is the most pressing. Or take turns choosing the direction. If everyone agreed to follow Jane's hook last time, let Sarah choose this week.

If your DM relies on prepared material, you need to find a justification explaining your character's change in priorities. Maybe the DM can toss you some clues suggesting that your priority and her plot hook intertwine. Perhaps the villain you're chasing was spotted at the opera house. These clues can be red herrings; the point is simply to provide a plausible reason for your character to follow the hook.

In certain cases, you'll just have to swallow your disbelief a bit. Think of the campaign as a TV show that alternates between self-contained episodes and ones that advance a larger story arc. In the self-contained stories, the characters go about their regular business, seemingly forgetting to pursue the bigger story, at least until sweeps week rolls around again. Your PC does the same, sacrificing strict story logic for entertainment value.

Personality

When you object on grounds of your character's personality, it's because the things demanded of her by the plot hook seem out of character.

- Your PC preaches tolerance of other religions, but the plot assumes that the PCs will want to pursue a group of supposed heretics.
- Your PC is extremely sensitive to insults, but the story assumes you'll work for an NPC who has mocked and taunted you in the past. You'd sooner challenge him to a duel than help drive goblin invaders off his ancestral lands.
- A staunch moralist, your paladin doesn't want to protect a criminal from her rivals, even though the other gang is the more brutal of the two.

Ask yourself if there are any circumstances under which you might imagine your PC taking the hook:

- You receive proof that the heretics are not just spreading an unorthodox doctrine but are harming people.
- The insulting NPC abjectly apologizes to you.
- The criminal promises to let his eldest son join the seminary, as he wishes to do, instead of pursuing the family business.

Propose these solutions to the DM, using the negotiating methods outlined above. If he really wants to preserve his prepared adventure, he'll adopt them or supply you with similar alternatives. Clever DMs can not only give you what you want but also use the changes as a springboard to further adventures. You've done him the favor of letting him know what your character cares about, which will make it easier to devise future plot hooks he can be sure you'll go for.

- After driving off the heretics, a trusted acquaintance claims that the evidence against them was trumped up. Now what do you do?
- Having gotten what he wanted from you, the insulting NPC withdraws his apology, challenging you to the duel you wanted all along.
- The criminal is slain, and the seminary student feels an obligation to his relatives to carry on as head of the gang, after all—unless your paladin can recruit a suitable replacement.

Wrapping It Up

Whatever your specific objection to the DM's plot hook, it never hurts to finish your discussion by briefly reviewing what you think you've agreed to do. (This is a good technique in any negotiation, one your PCs can also use when dickering with NPCs.) A quick review ensures that you, and your fellow players, aren't confused by the difference between the original plot hook and the new one. You have a better idea of what the DM wanted to do and can use it to better accommodate your character to his style of play in the future. A quick recap will also help him to tailor upcoming plot hooks to your idea of fun. Now you can go on to the night's adventure, knowing that you've preserved both your DM's hard work in preparing it and your feel for your character.

TIPS FOR THE DM

The best way to deal with the problem explored in this article is to prevent it from cropping up in the first place. One of your jobs as DM is to create plausible reasons for the PCs to embark on your adventure. You can't assume that the players will happily accept its premise just because you spent your valuable time on it. At the beginning of a campaign, you should keep plot hooks simple so that they appeal to the broadest possible range of PCs. As you become more familiar with the characters, you can more effectively tailor the plot hooks to their personalities, past histories, and alliances. The more detailed a set of PCs has become over time, the greater the need to carefully tailor your set-ups to accommodate them.

Take note of any conflicts that arise between PCs. When you create a plot hook, make sure that it doesn't touch on this conflict in a way that will split the party. For example, if some PCs work for the sheriff but others distrust him, you can't just have the sheriff appear and order them all to perform a mission. You can find either a new motivation for all of the PCs or a separate one for the PCs who mistrust the sheriff.

When preparing an adventure, take a few seconds to ask yourself whether each of the PCs would be equally interested in it. If not, add new reasons for participating, keyed to each PC.

Of course, players surprise DMs all the time, and you can't assume that they've read this article and will follow its suggestions. Encourage them to help you solve plot hook problems. Ask them to spell out their objections if they're not clear. Then ask under what circumstances they would accept the mission. Finally, do your best to incorporate their suggestions, without derailing your future plans.

ARE YOU A FOCUS HOG?

Another pitfall to avoid when you're a characterization fan in a group with mixed tastes is focus hoggery. When we identify intensely with our PCs, we concentrate on creating moments that show off our characters' defining traits. We work to move the storyline in directions that let us do that. Sometimes we can fall into the trap of seeing the rest of the game as nothing more than filler between our moments of brilliant roleplaying.

Pay attention to your actions in the course of a game. Make sure that you're not trampling over everyone else's focus time in an attempt to jumpstart your next big scene. If the other players seem irked by your character and enjoy thwarting his aims or just generally winding him up, this might be a sign that you're consuming more of the focus time than you think. Pause every so often to ask yourself whether you're interrupting others or otherwise yanking the spotlight away from them. Ask yourself at the end of each session how much of the DM's attention you claimed in comparison to the others. The answers might surprise you.

Focus hoggery is by no means the sole domain of the dedicated roleplayer; gamers of almost any stripe can indulge in it. But if you get an especially intense negative reaction when you reject the evening's plot hook, it might be because you're a focus hog and don't know it. The others might, consciously or otherwise, see your behavior as yet another attempt to assert more than your fair share of control over the game.

GARDEN OF SOULS

BY RICHARD LEE BYERS & ILLUSTRATED by MARK ZUG

SOMETIMES the agony blotted out everything else, even her comprehension of the source of her suffering. At other moments, as now, Shamur Uskevren was sufficiently lucid to perceive the intricate mesh of brambles for what it was, a living shroud pressing so close around her that every time her cramped muscles gave an involuntary twitch, black thorns pierced the faintly shining stuff that, in this place, served as her flesh.

The need to shift position wailed inside her, and she clenched her jaw against it. Then the weave of brambles stirred, jabbing thorns into her as it shifted and fell apart.

Dazed with pain, Shamur lay helpless as a bizarre creature, half human and half tree, bent down and picked her up. Its skin was rough, gray bark, the integument on its palms abrading her flesh. Its body was asymmetrical, with one arm longer than the other, and one hand possessed of a greater quantity of long, gnarled fingers. Its misshapen head was noseless, mouthless, earless, featureless except for two slanted, green-black eyes. So horrible was it that after a moment she found the strength to struggle, but to no avail. The creature was stronger than she was, and the bark armored it against her kicks and jabs.

A multitude of hair-thin tendrils sprouted from the plant man's face, chest, and arms. Still lengthening, they writhed toward Shamur and pierced her skin like pins. She felt them squirming inside her flesh, and

then they began to suck some vital essence from her.

The sensation was excruciating and indescribably foul, so much so that she lost consciousness for a time. When she came to her senses, the tendrils were gone, and the creature was lowering her enervated form to the ground. Her torturer manipulated the brambles somehow, and they wove themselves around her once more. She wept tears like diamonds, lambent as her flesh, and cursed her grand-niece.

SHAMUR hadn't always hated the dead girl, of course, even if she'd hated assuming her identity and living her dull, genteel life. When Lindrian Karn, her nephew and the lass's father, had asked her to keep a vigil with him in Argent Hall, their family's mansion, she had felt only concern, curiosity, and a certain grim sense of vindication. She had always believed some dastard had poisoned her kinswoman, and murder victims were sort of people who wound up as restless spirits, were they not?

But as midnight came and went, and as the hours crept on toward morning, she began to wonder if Lindrian had truly seen anything at all. Perhaps grief had caused him to hallucinate. But at last the apparition shimmered into being as he'd promised it would, a streak of mottled white light swimming in the shadows at the far end of the great hall. The air grew cold, and the single oil lamp that Lindrian had kindled burned blue.

"There," he said, pointing, the emerald on his finger catching the pale light.

"I see it," Shamur replied. She moved toward the phantasm, passing beneath the banners hanging from the rafters, her velvet skirt whispering. Lindrian followed.

When they came close enough, she saw the tortured form inside the pearly sheen. A willowy young woman with pale blond hair, a girl who precisely resembled her grand-aunt, stood straitly wrapped in shadowy netting. Her face was a mask of misery, and it was this, more than the mere fact of her presence, that gave Shamur a twinge of anxiety.

"That's how she appears every night," Lindrian said grimly. "You can't talk to her or anything. I've tried. I realize I should consult a priest about this, but as things stand, I don't see how I can."

"I GAVE UP SWORDPLAY, ADVENTURE, AND EVERYTHING ELSE THAT GAVE ME JOY SO I COULD IMPERSONATE YOUR INSIPID DAUGHTER."

Shamur nodded. More than fifty years ago, as a bored, hoydenish daughter of the House of Karn, she had become a notorious thief purely for the sport of it. When her identity was discovered, she was forced to flee Selgaunt, and expected she would never see the city of her birth again.

But subsequently, a strange magical accident displaced her half a century into the future, and, reasoning that the authorities couldn't still be seeking her after so long an absence, she returned home to see how her kin were faring. As it turned out, not well. A series of financial reverses had left House Karn at the brink of ruin, its only hope of salvation an alliance by marriage with the wealthy trader Thamalon Uskevren.

That hope seemingly passed away when Thamalon's intended, a gentle girl coincidentally also named Shamur, died mysteriously. Then, however, Fendo, head of House Karn, conceived a desperate plan. Since no one knew the original Shamur had returned to Selgaunt, the family could conceal the fact of the betrothed girl's death, and her namesake and double could marry Thamalon in her place.

It was a deception that must be preserved even now, lest the duped Lord Uskevren cast her off. Which meant that no outsider could be permitted to see the ghost of the younger Shamur haunting the mansion.

"I was hoping you might have some idea of what to do," Lindrian continued, fingering his curly beard. "You've been strange places, and seen peculiar things."

"I've seen skeletons animated by a wizard's malice," Shamur conceded, "and withered, silent things that infest graveyards and eat carrion. But never a shade like this . . ."

Struggling against her shadowy bonds, her features twisting in agony, the ghost contrived to shift herself around until she was looking directly at Shamur. Then she extended her slender, translucent hand. Only an inch or two, that was all her restraints would allow, but still, the intent was unmistakable. Shamur resisted the urge to flinch back a step.

"She reacted to your voice," Lindrian said, astonished.

"Apparently," Shamur replied.

"And now she wants you to clasp her hand. Go on, do it!"

"I'm not sure that's a good idea."

Lindrian stared at her as if she were being foolish. "But you can see she's in pain. Perhaps this is what you must do to end her suffering."

"Or perhaps not. Nephew, we don't know what this manifestation truly portends. Would you take Death's hand if it reached out for you?"

"I'd take her hand if she offered it to me," he replied. "She's my child, just as she's your kin. You owe it to your House—"

"How dare you," she snapped. "I gave up swordplay, adventure, and everything else that gave me joy so I could impersonate your insipid daughter. I wed myself to a stranger I do not love. All of it to preserve the House of Karn. I owe nothing more."

Lindrian lowered his eyes. "I . . . I know. I apologize. It's just that I've seen her like this every night for a week. I fear she'll be this way forever unless someone can bring her peace."

"Be still," Shamur said. "Let me think." She turned away from both her nephew and the anguished apparition with its outstretched hand.

She'd spoken only the truth. She bore no further indebtedness to her kin. Moreover, she had an infant son to care for, Tamlin, who had brought a sliver of happiness into her life when she'd despaired of ever feeling such again. No one could blame her if she walked away.

And yet . . .

She had come to love her demure, mild-mannered grandniece, who had worn her face yet been so dissimilar in temperament, during the brief time they'd spent together, and it distressed her to see the lass in torment. Besides, whatever else the haunting might signify, it offered the chance to plunge into the unknown, to take a dare, when she had despaired of ever having such an opportunity again. If she

came to grief as a result, what would it truly matter? Save for Tamlin, her bland, cosseted existence was joyless anyway.

She turned back around. "All right, I'll do it. But if I keel over dead, I wish you luck explaining my demise to Thamalon."

Forcing herself to move boldly, without hesitation, she stepped forward and enfolded her grand-niece's cool, shining fingers in her own.

"I'm sorry," the spirit whispered.

Shamur felt herself, her essence, wrenched from her body, even as she somehow sensed the ghost surging into it. The great hall disappeared, and the former adventurer tumbled vertiginously down, or perhaps up, a long, black corridor. At the end, the dark mesh which had bound her grand-niece suddenly surrounded her, and she discovered that it wasn't a net after all, but brambles.

THE THOUGHT of her grand-niece's treachery filled Shamur with an anger that swelled until it eclipsed the pain and horror of her situation and restored her to a kind of clarity. It was then she remembered the manner in which the brambles had opened.

The wooden man had pulled loose one particular strand, then three or four others, whereupon the entire intricate tangle had fallen apart. It was like a trick knot, a complex lock, or a mechanical trap, and during her years as a thief, she'd become expert at defeating such contrivances.

The problem was that as soon as she attempted to free herself, the thorns would pierce her flesh, and keep on stabbing with every move she made. Or was that a problem after all? The stickers had already stung her scores of times, yet she bore no marks, just as the plant creature's tendrils had left no permanent wounds. Perhaps she could proceed despite the thorns, as long as she could find the fortitude to endure the pain.

Before she so much as stirred, she studied the interwoven brambles, trying to identify the one that had moved first. She couldn't. She'd have to proceed by trial and error.

She reached for a bramble, hissed as thorns pierced her arms, flinched when she grasped the woody stalk and stickers sank into her palms. She pulled on the strand, but was unable to dislodge it.

She tried another, and then another after that.

At times the pain screamed so loud in her tortured limbs that she feared it would addle her, and she wouldn't be able to remember which brambles she'd already pulled on and which were left to try. She constantly fought the temptation to pause and so diminish the torment for a moment, for fear that if she did, she wouldn't have the courage to begin anew.

Finally one of the brambles pulled loose from the tangle. She croaked a crazed laugh and seized hold of another. Because it wasn't the right one, the first stalk slithered back into place. She would have to draw it free over and over again, hurting herself every time, as she searched for the second piece of the puzzle.

As it turned out, she had to identify four strands in all, and pull them forth in the proper order, to make the rest of the brambles unknot themselves and fall limply to the ground around her. She sprawled there for a second, hurting, spent, dazed, but her adventurer's instincts warned her that she mustn't simply lie in the open, lest the tree man return and find her so. Groaning, she forced herself to her feet and looked about.

The gray sky overhead possessed no sun, moon, or stars, but seemed to glow by itself, suffusing the scene with a feeble twilight. The illumination sufficed to reveal that Shamur was standing in a vast garden, albeit not of a sort she had ever encountered before. Most of the plants looked unfamiliar and in many cases, utterly strange. Indeed, when she peered more closely, she scowled to see that quite a few had been cultivated to hold and torture prisoners like herself. Luminous human figures hung crucified on tall thorn bushes, or, more horribly still, had been metamorphosed into forms half man and half vegetable, their extremities rooted in the soil, their faces slack or contorted amid rings of petals. Most of the sufferers bore wounds, a pierced chest or a crushed skull, which ought to be lethal, and, she realized, no doubt had been when the ghostly prisoners first sustained them.

THE PRISONER HUNG ON A TRELLIS WITH SOMETHING RESEMBLING GRAPEVINES TWINED ALL AROUND HIM.

Shamur glided toward the nearest of these captives with the sure, silent tread of a master housebreaker, noticing as she did so that the pains inflicted by the brambles had entirely faded away. Nice, but it would be reckless in the extreme to assume that nothing in this unearthly place could destroy her or do permanent, incapacitating harm.

She wished she had some clothing, and a semblance of her old, dark, mannish adventuring attire. High, soft boots, trews, loose shirt, gauntlets, and hooded cloak shimmered into existence on her naked limbs. Smiling at this unexpected bounty, she wished for a broadsword as well. A blade did appear in her grasp, but it was a soft, waxy, useless thing that immediately bent under its own weight, and, snorting, she cast it aside.

The prisoner hung on a trellis with something resembling grapevines twined all around him. "I'm going to free you," she said, but he didn't respond. Perhaps the creepers somehow prevented him from seeing or hearing her.

She tore the vines away. They squirmed sluggishly in her hands, but offered no real resistance. Finally the captive dropped away from the lattice. She managed an awkward catch, then laid him gently on the ground.

"Gather your strength," she said. "We have to get away from here."

The man still didn't answer.

"It's all right," she said. "You're free, and you'll stay that way. We're going to release all the prisoners, form our own little army, and slay the Gardener." It was as good a name as any for the tree man.

Still no reply. She peered into his wasted features and saw the emptiness. At some point, he'd rejected the horror of the outside world and fled deep inside himself, so deep that no one could call him back.

She sighed and moved on to a woman who dangled as if from a gallows, her head buried amid the petals of a huge pink peony. Shamur pulled the prisoner free without much

difficulty, but then the woman, who was elderly, with a wrinkled face, grizzled hair, and a gaping, bloodless gash in the side of her neck, howled and raked at her rescuer's face with her nails.

Shamur jerked back to avoid being scratched, then caught the old woman in a submission hold, twisting her arm up behind her back. "Calm down!" the aristocrat said. "I'm a friend. I freed you."

But no matter what reassurances she gave, the other woman continued to struggle and snarl. In the end, Shamur had to choke her unconscious simply to get away from her. Otherwise, the crone would have pursued and attacked her relentlessly.

Shamur wondered, had she not managed to free herself from the brambles, how long it would have taken her to go mad? She shivered.

ITS FORM WAS A WEAVE OF RUSTLING VINES AND BRANCHES, ITS FANGS, POINTED STICKS, ITS EYES, SCARLET, FIVE-PETALED FLOWERS . . .

It was obvious the captives were of no use to her. She couldn't wander around the garden freeing each in turn just on the off chance of finding one or two sane ones, or the wooden man would catch her for certain. Whatever she did next, she would have to do alone.

A sensible person would flee the garden, or, should that prove impractical, go into hiding indefinitely. But Shamur had never been considered particularly sensible, and she had retribution to exact, first on the creature who had so violated her, and then on the treacherous kinswoman who had trapped her in this nightmare.

Unfortunately, she had no idea of how to go about doing that, but perhaps if she did some exploring, she would discover something helpful. Darting noiselessly from one bit of cover to the next, she began to creep through the garden. The gray gloaming remained unchanged, promising a night that never came. Leaves rustled in a cool, fitful breeze, and blossoms drenched the air with their scents.

Then, from up ahead, something rattled and snapped. She glided forward even more cautiously, halting as soon as she spied what was making the noise. The Gardener stood on a little hillock in a cleared space, casting a silvery net up into the air. The mesh seemed to spread up and out until it lay across the whole blank, phosphorescent sky. That, of course, was physically impossible, but Shamur knew enough about wizardry to understand that it might be true in a magical sense.

The net jerked, and the Gardener hauled it in. Feebly squirming in the mesh was the shining figure of a young man, his neck creased with the mark of a garrote. The bark-skinned creature took hold of him, and in an instant he shrunk into a tiny, inert oval very much like a seed. The Gardener dropped the pellet into a pouch and cast the net again.

Shamur watched while the Gardener pulled in five more spirits, each of whom possessed some ugly wound, guts spilling from a rent in the belly in one case, a severed leg in another. By then, she reckoned she'd sussed out the essence of what was happening. Here in the afterlife—here in Hell, she supposed—the plant man was a devil possessed of some sort of infernal dispensation to catch the souls of those who had perished at the hands of their fellow men, and to imprison them in the garden for its sustenance.

The Gardener folded the net and began to walk away. Hoping her adversary would lead her somewhere useful, Shamur shadowed the creature, stepping so silently and exploiting the available cover so adroitly that even Errendar Spillwine, the master rogue who'd taught her thiefcraft, would have approved. She reckoned it only prudent to exert her talents to the utmost. Though the tree man lacked visible ears, it might still be able to hear somehow, or to sense a stalker in some inhuman manner.

But whatever its capacities, the Gardener never turned, and after a while, something astonishing swam out of the gloom ahead: a titanic object that was both a stand of huge, red-boled trees and a castle. The trunks had grown spiraling staircases, doorways, windows, and balconies to serve the hollows—the rooms—inside. They also held certain massive, flat-topped limbs in common, walkways connecting one tower to another.

The tree-castle was obviously the Gardener's home, with luck, a source of weapons or at least of useful knowledge. Now that the creature had led her this far, Shamur was disinclined to continue following close behind it, constantly risking detection. Better to let the plant man go on ahead, wait a while, and then sneak in among the trees.

It was difficult to judge time when the sky never changed. She sat for what seemed an hour, then moved warily on.

As she scanned the wooden ramparts, checking for sentries, she wondered how Tamlin was faring in her absence and felt a pang of maternal anxiety. She was still trying to dismiss it—for the nurse knew her business, after all—when the stoat emerged from the bushes just ahead.

Or at least that was Shamur's first impression, for like the weasels with which she was familiar, it had a long, sinuous body carried low to the ground, a triangular head, and a narrow snout. For all that, it was as long as three horses standing nose to tail, and looked capable of snapping her head off with one bite. But in another second, she saw that it, like the Gardener who had probably set it here to serve as his watchdog, was a plant entity. Its form was a weave of rustling vines and branches, its fangs, pointed sticks, its eyes, scarlet, five-petaled flowers, and its nose, a patch of gray-green moss.

Intending to conceal herself behind it, Shamur backed toward a bush, each of whose coppery leaves was a shrunken, trembling, whimpering soul in torment. She was halfway there when the plant being pivoted, peered, and loped in her direction.

Shamur ran, her cloak flapping. The monster bounded after her.

The noblewoman knew how fast earthly weasels were, and had no need to glance backward to be certain her pursuer was gaining on her. She had only seconds to find some means of defense.

At first, casting desperately about, she saw nothing that could serve her purpose. Meanwhile, the stoat's footfalls drummed up behind her, narrowing her lead with every stride. Finally she registered the potential usefulness of a tree with a low-hanging limb.

She swerved, sprang into the air, and grabbed the branch.

It snapped free with a shower of blood. She landed, spun around, and gasped. The stoat was there, right on top of her, reeking of sap and verdure, its jaws with their wooden fangs already flashing forward to rend her.

She reflexively thrust the branch like a spear, and the end jabbed the creature's mossy nose. Evidently the plant creature felt pain like a normal animal—thank the gods for that!—for it snatched its head back, then instantly struck at her again.

She thrust, connected, but this time the weasel's impetus knocked her staggering backward. The creature lunged at her, and, still off balance, she flung herself desperately to the side. The monster's teeth snagged and tore her cape, but nothing more. She recovered her equilibrium and rammed her makeshift weapon into the underside of its throat.

Evidently she hadn't hurt it that time, for it instantly sprang at her. She frantically swung the stick to club the creature in the snout, and it caught the makeshift weapon in its jaws.

The weasel drove forward, pushing Shamur back as it gnashed the branch to splinters with its fangs. In a moment, there would be nothing left of the weapon, and thus nothing to keep the monster from pouncing on Shamur and disposing of her in much the same manner.

She suddenly let go of the stick, lunged forward past the gnashing fangs, grabbed hold of the creature's red flower-eye, and ripped it out of its fibrous, leafy head.

The attack left her vulnerable. The stoat need only whip its head around to catch her in its jaws. But she knew that most creatures were instinctively protective of their eyes, and she prayed the damage she'd just inflicted would make even this unnatural horror flinch away.

It did. Indeed, the maneuver, which she'd hoped would buy her a moment to cast about for another weapon, worked better than expected. The monster recoiled, then turned and ran away into the perpetual dusk.

Shamur realized she was grinning. It was insane, really. She was trapped in a ghastly netherworld. It was, to say the least, questionable that she could slay the Gardener, nor could she be sure that doing so would improve her situation; it seemed all too likely that another demonic tormentor would appear to take up where the first one had left off. The only thing she was certain of was that, at this point, she still had no idea of how to get back to the world of the living.

Yet she couldn't deny the exultation singing inside her. This, pitting her wits and prowess against long odds, was exactly what she'd delighted in, what she'd required to be happy, before she'd imprisoned herself in her grand-niece's banal little life. So it was that, marooned in this terrible place, divorced from everything she'd ever known, she nonetheless felt as if she'd come home to herself.

She looked at the tree-castle, trying to see if the sound of battle had attracted anyone's attention. As far as she could tell, it hadn't. She sniffed the scarlet flower, which proved to smell rather like cinnamon, then skulked on. Another minute brought her into the hushed, shadowed space amid the immense, ruddy trunks.

It felt peaceful there, like the interior of some dimly lit temple with soaring columns, but she very much suspected that atmosphere was deceptive. She took two steps toward the nearest staircase and discovered just how right she was.

Plants burst from the soil in a circle around her, growing seven feet tall in the blink of an eye. Like certain carnivorous plants with which she was familiar, they sprouted bifurcated pods with fleshy spikes along the sides. Unlike the small specimens in her own garden, these weren't content to wait passively until prey wandered into their maws. The pairs of green jaws leaped at her, quick as striking serpents.

Shamur was startled, but sheer reflex kicked her into a dive at the gap between two stalks. A gnashing pod just missed her arm, spattering her with droplets that burned tiny holes in her sleeve, and then she broke out of the ring. She ran three strides, enough to take her beyond the plants' reach, then turned.

The plants struck impotently after her for another few heartbeats, then withered, showering dry, brown leaves onto the ground. Evidently, growing so quickly, they'd used up all the life they had.

Shamur looked up. The commotion hadn't drawn anyone into view, so she stood absolutely still and pondered her situation.

Mantraps guarded the ground beneath the trees. She'd triggered one, and escaped death by pure good fortune as much as anything else. If she set off many more, her luck was bound to run out, but peer as she might, she couldn't spot any telltale sign of where the snares were laid. That was often the problem with magical traps.

She supposed that meant she would have to trigger at least one more. She walked slowly forward, staring downward, studying the ground. She barely had time to notice she was treading on earth just a shade less dark than the soil surrounding it, on scattered blades of grass of a slightly paler green that the rest, and then another circle of towering plants sprang up around her.

These sprouted white, bulbous flowers that blew out a roiling gray vapor. She hastily held her breath, but the fumes still burned her eyes and skin. She lunged for the space between two stalks, and, moving unexpectedly, the plants swatted her with big, dark green leaves like stiff leather, knocking her back into the center of the ring.

SHE SUDDENLY GRABBED HOLD OF THE CREATURE'S RED FLOWER-EYE AND RIPPED IT OUT OF ITS FIBROUS, LEAFY HEAD.

Half blind with tears, the air in her lungs nearly exhausted, she positioned herself in front of the same two plants. There she repeatedly pretended to lunge forward, trying to provoke them into striking. At last they did. She skipped back, and the leaves missed by a hair. Instantly, before the plants could steady themselves for another attack, she pushed between them.

Kneeling on the ground, wiping her stinging eyes and gasping in breaths of cool, wholesome air, she watched with satisfaction as this poisonous flowers wilted and crumbled. In another minute, she recovered sufficiently to move on.

Now that she knew how to spot the snares, Shamur reached the stairs without further difficulty. She lifted her foot to set it on the first step, then hesitated.

Her instincts whispered that the staircase harbored

mantraps as well. Perhaps she could survive them as she had the previous ones, but it would be more prudent to circumvent them. She walked to another point at the base of the tree and began to climb the trunk. The surface was irregular enough to provide hand- and toe-holds for an accomplished burglar.

A few minutes later, she swung herself onto the landing at the top of the staircase. From here on out, she reckoned there should be less danger of traps. As a rule, the occupants of a stronghold were far more likely to lay a plenitude of snares on the approaches to their fortress than inside the pile itself. Otherwise, they would find it a nuisance just to move around. On the other hand, she figured there would now be a far greater risk of one of the Gardener's guards or lackeys catching sight of her.

But on the latter point, the next two hours proved her wrong. She prowled the limb walkways and the mazes of chambers inside the trunks of the great trees without ever hearing or catching a glimpse of anyone. Eventually, she concluded that the Gardener must dwell in this vast place alone, and that truly was an extraordinary stroke of luck. She would only have to contend with the devil itself, and not a host of retainers.

For a while, though, she feared it was the last bit of luck that would come her way, because her investigations weren't turning up anything helpful. Many of the castle rooms were empty. Some were so strangely shaped and furnished that she couldn't even guess their functions. A number were devoted to dark magic, with complex pentacles and sigils grown into the grain of the floors and walls, and a hint of skin-prickling power still hanging in the air. None seemed to hold anything that could serve as a weapon. Finally, however, skulking along one of the highest walkways to a chamber near the top of one of the trees, she glimpsed a faint gleaming in the arched doorway ahead, a gleaming that might just be metal.

AFTER A MOMENT, SHE SAW IT, A LENGTH OF BLUE STEEL SHINING AS IF POSSESSED OF ITS OWN INTERNAL LUMINOSITY.

Excited, she hurried forward, then caught herself. Before, she'd reasoned that the occupants of a castle wouldn't lay numerous mantraps around the interior. But they might well set them to guard their valuables. She looked down and saw ranks upon ranks of pale spots in the ruddy wood in front of her feet, dots that reminded her of the triggers of the snares she'd already encountered.

Grinning at the lapse that had nearly killed her, she contemplated how best to avoid the traps. With a running start, she might be able to jump over all the rows of trigger dots, but she might fall short, also. There was a surer way. The branch walkway had grown itself a sort of natural handrail. The top of the banister was only an inch wide, but that was plenty for a woman who'd walked tightropes in her time. She climbed up onto the pale, and then, unperturbed by the dizzying drop below her, walked lightly to the end. She sprang off and landed just inside the arch.

She was still congratulating herself on her agility when, rustling and clattering, something heaved itself up from the dimness inside the room and rushed her.

Unarmed, caught in the doorway with the guardian creature on one side and the mantraps on the other, Shamur had only one place to go. She whirled and dived out over the rail she'd just negotiated.

She twisted in the air and caught the banister as she hurtled past. Her arms throbbed as they took her weight, and then she was dangling on the outside of the walkway.

The mighty limb shook. A cacophony of rattling, cracking, and smacking sounded overhead. By pursuing her out the doorway, the watch creature had triggered the traps.

Shamur tensed. If one of the snare plants leaned over the pale and attacked her, she would be helpless to defend herself. But none of them did. Their purpose was to attack whatever ventured onto their section of the walkway, and they performed it singlemindedly.

After a time, the shaking and the noise ceased. The air smelled of decay. Shamur cautiously pulled herself up to take a look. The traps had destroyed their fellow guardian—another thing made of sticks and leaves, by the looks of its remains—and afterwards expired themselves. She swung herself over the rail, reentered the chamber, and then laughed softly.

The room was an armory, the gleaming she had spied before was light reflecting from the boss of a target shield.

Actually, Shamur had no use for a shield. She'd never learned to fight with one. What she needed was a sword, a broadsword, preferably, and after a moment, she saw it, a length of blue steel shining as if possessed of its own internal luminosity. She removed the glaive from its wall mounts, tested the edge and point, and found them exceedingly keen. She hefted it, and liked the weight and balance.

It was a splendid blade, but, she wondered suddenly, was it the right weapon for the task at hand? No one used a sword for chopping wood, and that was what the Gardener was made of. Perhaps a battleaxe would serve her better, for all that she'd never trained with one of those, either.

Unwilling to abandon the broadsword without a trial, she took an experimental swing at the wall. The blue blade bit deep into the wood at least as easily as a common blade would cleave flesh. For a heartbeat or so, cracks snaked out from the gash, eating away parts of the ligneous surface undamaged by the initial impact.

Delighted, Shamur suspected that the sword bore specific enchantments against wood. Perhaps, like humans, the Gardener's devilish race sometimes fought among themselves.

Not that she really cared why the Gardener possessed such an implement. All that mattered was that she now had the perfect tool to pay the monster back for its cruelties. Smiling, no longer creeping but striding, she went in search of her tormentor.

It took at least an hour, but she finally found the plant man in a spacious, unfurnished chamber high up in one of the trees. Its back to her, the creature stood gazing out a long window at the far end of the room. Evidently it enjoyed overlooking its domain, the garden of anguish spread out far below.

As she stalked into the room, the broadsword held inconspicuously behind her right leg, it occurred to Shamur that a wise rogue would strike the devil down from behind,

before it became aware of her presence. But where was the sport in that? She lifted two fingers to her lips and gave a piercing whistle.

The Gardener proved that it could indeed hear by lurching around. It goggled, then strode to meet her with all the vexed self-assurance of a farmwife hurrying to catch an errant chicken. Shamur suddenly displayed the blue sword, and the tree man froze.

She laughed and charged, blade poised for a head cut.

Grinding and popping, the Gardener's forearms elongated, while its hands swelled into huge members vaguely reminiscent of a praying mantis's outsize forelimbs. The wooden man deflected her blade with one fused, misshapen fist, and, pivoting, punched at her with the other. The sharp protrusions might well have pierced her deeply, and the sheer force snapped her bones, had she not twisted aside.

The Gardener swung its right arm up to hammer her down like a nail. She met the descending fist with a stop thrust. Her point plunged in deep, and the creature jerked its arm back.

She instantly followed up with a jump forward and a slash at the Gardener's knee. The wooden man lurched back and shielded itself with its left fist, sustaining a wound that sheared the gnarled horn from one of its knuckles, but at least preserving its ability to walk.

The battle proceeded in similar fashion for the next two minutes. Nimbly avoiding harm herself, Shamur inflicted wound after wound on the Gardener's hands and forearms. But every time she tried to penetrate deeper and end the fight with a telling cut or thrust to the head or torso, her adversary managed to balk her.

A web of cracks connected the numerous punctures and gashes on the Gardener's fists. Given time, its hands might well disintegrate and leave the creature defenseless. But Shamur was worried about tiring before that could happen. If she slowed down even a little, her foe might finally land one of those ferocious blows. She was also feeling impatient, frustrated that, even though she was more than holding her own, she'd repeatedly failed to deliver a killing stroke.

She whirled the broadsword in yet another counterattack. The blue blade hacked a large chunk of wood from the Gardener's left wrist. The creature's arm convulsed, shedding other loose fragments of itself, then flopped limply at its side.

Confident she could now finish the devil off, Shamur grinned. She stepped into the distance, inviting an attack, and the Gardener obliged by flailing with its good arm. She saw the blow coming before the tree man even started swinging, and dodged easily. Then, before the monster could pull its arm back for another strike, she lunged.

The broadsword flicked out for a flank cut. The Gardener hastily retreated, turning what could have a lethal wound into a superficial one. Keeping the pressure on, Shamur sprang from the lunge into a running attack. The move was all aggression, as it was extremely difficult for a fencer to attempt any sort of defense while hurling himself forward so precipitately. But she was sure she was in no danger. The Gardener was currently trying to use its functional hand as a shield rather than a weapon.

The other hand, the supposedly crippled, useless one, streaked up at her.

Idiot! she thought. Knowing itself on the verge of defeat, the Gardener had conceived a desperate ploy, and the ruse had gulled her perfectly.

Even as she reproached herself, she fought her own momentum to evade the tree man's hurtling fist. She veered a little. She was moving away from the blow when it connected, and perhaps that robbed it of a bit of its force. Still, it slammed into her ribs and sparked a blaze of agony. One of the twisted spikes snagged her cloak, spinning her like a top before ripping free.

KNOWING ITSELF ON THE VERGE OF DEFEAT, THE GARDENER HAD CONCEIVED A DESPERATE PLOY, AND THE RUSE HAD GULLED HER PERFECTLY.

Shamur stumbled. Dropped to one knee. Fought for an endless moment against the shock and pain, until, with a snarl, she lurched back to her feet.

The broadsword was heavy in her hand. Her thoughts were tangled, and her vision blurry. She peered in confusion at the empty space in front of her, then finally realized the Gardener must be behind her.

She reeled about, and the Gardener punched at her. Still unsteady, caught flat-footed, she frantically dropped into a squat beneath the intended trajectory of the blow, knowing full well the move wouldn't save her if the wooden man adjusted its aim in time.

But it didn't. The evasion had taken the devil by surprise. Its massive fist streaked over her head, and feeling stronger and clearer than she had a moment before, she sprang up in front of it. She drove the point of her blade up into its neck and out the back of its head.

The Gardener convulsed, then froze. For a moment the devil was dead weight handing on her blade, and nearly dragged her to the floor. Then, with a rending, crackling noise, fissures ran through it from head to toe, and it disintegrated into a scatter of chips.

Shamur stood over the creature's remains for a moment, gasping for breath, reveling in her victory, and wondering where to look for a way home. Then something shivered through the air, a feeling like the peal of a gong, although in fact, there was no sound. A white light flowered at her back.

She could have wept. She'd considered the possibility that another horror might turn up if the Gardener perished, but not immediately! It wasn't fair, but it was happening, and so she spun around, came on guard, then hesitated.

Before her stood a smiling, white-bearded man-at-arms with a silver-hilted longsword sheathed at his side and a snowy surcoat draping his lean, mail-clad body. The kite shield on his arm bore the hammer-and-scales device of Tyr, the beneficent god of justice.

His appearance was reassuring. Still, she kept her sword pointed in his direction.

"Be at ease, Shamur Uskevren," said the aged warrior. "I'm a friend."

"Perhaps," she replied, "but you can't blame me for being suspicious of people I meet in Hell."

"But this isn't Hell," he said, "although I concede it's a fair approximation. It's an artificial place that devil constructed to be its stronghold, well situated to waylay the transmigrating

spirits of the newly dead. My brotherhood has aspired to storm it for a long time, but the brute's enchantments kept us out. Now that you've done what we could not, the imprisoned souls, restored and revitalized, will continue their journeys to the halls of their respective gods."

He nodded toward the window. Outside in the garden, luminous figures were floating up into the air like sparks from a bonfire.

Shamur felt a mingling of exultation and irony. It was the latter she elected to express. "If the Gardener could snare the poor wretches through no fault of their own, then evidently there's no justice after death, either."

"You overstate the case, but you have a point. The universe is not yet perfect, though my comrades and I are fighting to make it so. It is a greater undertaking—a greater challenge—than a mortal can readily imagine."

"Then can you send me back to my own world, sir knight? That would make the cosmos a little more perfect, at least from my perspective."

"I DIDN'T WANT TO TASTE ANY OF THE JOYS OF THE MORTAL WORLD, FOR FEAR IT WOULD MAKE IT THAT MUCH HARDER TO GIVE IT UP."

The warrior hesitated, and she felt a surge of apprehension that he would tell her no, there was no going back, for she was truly dead, now and forever. But at length he said, "I can open a door for you, my child, if that is what you wish. It's the least you deserve for the service you have rendered."

"It's all I need," she replied. She remembered her grand-niece's perfidy, and her fingers tightened on the haft of her sword. "I have another score to settle." She didn't know precisely how she would avenge herself and reclaim her rightful place in the realm of the living, what powers she as a disembodied spirit would possess, but she trusted she would manage somehow.

The knight of Tyr nodded. "So be it." He fingered the moonstone set in the pommel of his sword, and a rectangle of golden light appeared in the empty air.

"Thank you," Shamur said, thinking it inadequate but not knowing what to add. She stepped into the luminous space, felt an instant of searing cold, a sensation of falling, the broadsword vanishing from her grasp, and then she was precisely where she'd wished to go.

She hadn't really thought about what her grand-niece might have gotten up to clothed in her stolen flesh, but if she had, she might have pictured her feasting, dancing, or embracing her beloved Thamalon. Reveling somehow, at any rate. Instead, the dead girl was still in the great hall, perched on a three-legged stool. Lindrian, however, was nowhere to be seen.

At first the younger Shamur looked profoundly worried, but when she caught sight of her grand-aunt's ghostly form, her face lit up. "You did it!" she cried.

Shamur blinked in surprise, for delight at her reappearance certainly wasn't the reaction she'd expected. "Did what?"

"Killed the master of the garden! You must have, or you wouldn't be back. I knew you could!"

"Then . . . you didn't simply intend to trap me there and steal my body for all time?"

"Stars above, of course not!" The girl sounded genuinely shocked. "How could you think such a thing? From the moment I somehow sensed I could reach out to you, my twin, my other self, and trade places with you, my thought was always to have you accomplish what I could not." She smiled ruefully. "You see me sitting, cold, thirsty, and alone in this gloomy place. I didn't want to taste any of the joys of the mortal world, for fear it would make it that much harder to give it up. I even sent Father away to deny myself the pleasure of his company."

Shamur felt the anger go out of her, giving way to an untidy jumble of emotions, affection, wry amusement—during her years as an adventurer, people had often thrust her into the most impossible situations, blithely confident that she could cope—and anticlimax among them. "I didn't understand, and I wronged you in my thoughts, Grand-niece. Please, forgive me."

"Don't be silly! You delivered me from eternal torture. I will always be grateful, and always love you."

"I love you, too, child, and I'm glad I could help." Shamur recalled the thrill of driving off the stoat, the rapture of defeating the Gardener himself. "Very glad."

"Now I must beg one more kindness. Come resume your proper place. Chill, dark room or no, it's difficult to be alive again, knowing I can't remain this way. I'll feel better when I've moved on."

"Very well. I'm not eager to bid you farewell a second time, when we've hardly talked at all, but I suppose it's what must be. Still, we can't switch quite yet. First there's something you must tell me! I'm now certain someone murdered you, ended your life far too early and in so doing, ruined mine as well. Give me his name and I'll avenge us both!"

The younger woman shook her head. "I'm sorry, Grand-aunt. I suppose that since I fell into the Gardener's clutches, someone probably did kill me, but I have no idea who."

Shamur's eager anticipation petrified into a numb, leaden feeling. She had so few sources of satisfaction anymore, and it seemed that revenge too would be denied her.

"Please, take your body back." The dead girl extended her hand. Shamur reached to take it, then noticed the portal of light still hanging in the air, and hesitated.

Did she truly want to reclaim her earthly shell, when she now knew there was a world beyond the mortal sphere, a realm where she could bear a sword against formidable enemies, explore wondrous lands, and in all things behave in accordance with her nature? Surely the warrior in white would welcome her into his band of champions. That was why he'd seemed reluctant to send her back, and why the doorway still stood open. So let the younger woman keep the soft, dreary life which her grand-aunt loathed, but which would seem a paradise to her.

But no. It was a glorious dream, but a dream it must remain. It simply wasn't in Shamur's nature to throw away her mortal existence, no matter how unsatisfactory it had become. She'd fought to preserve her life on too many occasions. Besides, she had a son to raise.

Quickly, before her resolve could waver, she took her grand-niece's hand. The world spun, and then she was wearing her own body of flesh and bone again, while both the dead girl and the shining door were gone. As the lass had warned, her skin was goose flesh, and her throat was dry. D

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Mind flayers

MIND BLAST

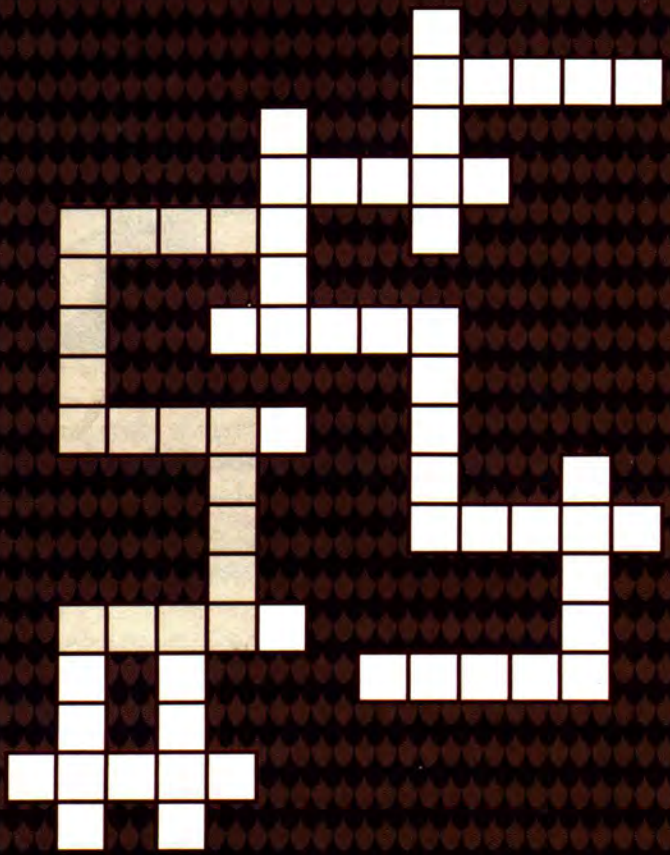
Warp wood is a spell that is two words of the same length, both starting with the same letter. What is the only spell in the *Player's Handbook* that is THREE words of the same length, all three starting with the same letter?

You can find the solution to this *MIND BLAST* on page 84

no. 23

by Mike Selinker

As evidenced by their shaded symbol in the grid below, the Council of Five has arrived. The Council is a body of five high-level spellcasters that cast only spells from the *Player's Handbook* whose names are five letters long. Their complete spell list appears below. Place the names of their spells into the grid so that each spell is used only once.



SPELL LIST

ALARM	CLONE	HASTE	MOUNT	SLEEP
BLESS	DREAM	KNOCK	QUEST	SNARE
BLINK	ERASE	LIGHT	SCARE	WIERD
	FLARE		SHOUT	

no. 22 SOLUTION

	LETTERS	MONSTER
1.	CUBS	SUCCUBUS
2.	SHARK	RAKSHASA
3.	RIVET	RETRIEVER
4.	HATING	NIGHT HAG
5.	FLOWER	WEREWOLF (or WOLFWERE)
6.	CROAK	AAROKOCRA
7.	GROANED	RED DRAGON (or GREEN DRAGON)
8.	TERMINAL	AIR ELEMENTAL
9.	RESPAWN	SNAPPER-SAW
10.	MINGLERS	GREEN SLIME
11.	DUPING	DUN PUDDING
12.	HALTING	HILL GIANT
13.	BRIGADE	DIRE BADGER
14.	TAVERN	REVENANT
15.	REMOUNTS	RUST MONSTER
16.	TRAIPSED	SPIDER EATER
17.	HORK	HOOK HORROR
18.	ACHIER	ACHAIERAI
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CLASS ACTS
FLAME STEWARD

by Monte Cook · illustrated by Val Mayerik

The Sacred Flame brings life as well as destruction. Through its searing heat, we are purified, healed, and made greater. The glorious sheets of flame wash our enemies away.

—The Mantra of the Brotherhood of the Sacred Flame

The Sacred Flame is a mystical, interdimensional source of energy considered important by all the non-evil gods, although it is associated with no one god specifically. The flame stewards are those mortals who devote themselves to learning its mysteries and harnessing its power—while respecting its might. They can call upon it for healing and purification, as well as personal puissance and even fiery attack powers.

Although flame stewards can be of any class, normally clerics find that it fits their vocation and way of life best. Paladins and even rangers enjoy the power that the Sacred Flame provides.

NPC flame stewards most often gather in small monastic-like orders. They use their combined abilities to help others (often for a price to support their studies of the Sacred Flame) and to learn more about the wonders of their chosen focus.

Class Features

• **Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** The flame steward is proficient with all simple weapons and with all types of armor and shields.

• **Might of the Sacred Flame:** The flame steward infuses himself with the power of the Sacred Flame. He gains a +1 inherent bonus to Strength and +3 additional hit points (as if from the Toughness feat) at 1st level. At 3rd level the inherent bonus increases to +2, and the flame steward gains another +3 hit points. At 5th level the inherent bonus increases to +3, and the flame steward gains another +3 hit points. At 7th level the inherent bonus increases to +4, and the flame steward gains another +3 hit points. At 9th level the inherent bonus increases to +5, and the flame steward gains another +3 hit points.

• **Spells:** Beginning at 1st level, a flame steward gains the ability to cast a small number of divine spells. To cast a spell, the flame steward must have a

FLAME STEWARD — HIT DIE D8

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells Per Day 1	2	3	4	5
1	+1	+2	+0	+2	Might of the Sacred Flame	1	—	—	—	—
2	+2	+3	+0	+3	*Sacred firefan*	2	—	—	—	—
3	+3	+3	+1	+3	Might of the Sacred Flame	2	1	—	—	—
4	+4	+4	+1	+4	Flames of healing	2	2	—	—	—
5	+5	+4	+1	+4	Might of the Sacred Flame	2	2	1	—	—
6	+6	+5	+2	+5	*Sacred flame strike*	3	2	2	—	—
7	+7	+5	+2	+5	Might of the Sacred Flame	3	2	2	1	—
8	+8	+6	+2	+6	Purging flames	3	3	2	2	—
9	+9	+6	+3	+6	Might of the Sacred Flame	3	3	2	2	1
10	+10	+7	+3	+7	*Sacred firestorm*	3	3	3	2	2

Answer to Mind Blast: SEPIA SNAKE SIGIL.

Wisdom score of at least 10 + the spell's level, so a flame steward with a Wisdom of 10 or lower cannot cast these spells. Flame steward bonus spells are based on Wisdom, and saving throws against these spells have a DC of 10 + spell level + Wisdom modifier. The flame steward's spell list appears to the right; a flame steward has access to any spell on the list and can freely choose which to prepare, just like a cleric. A flame steward prepares and casts spells just as a cleric does (though the flame steward cannot lose a spell to cast a cure spell in its place).

- ***Sacred Firefan:*** The 2nd level flame steward can emit a fan of flames as a spell-like ability. This is exactly like the spell *burning hands* except that half of the damage is divine power rather than simply fire, so even creatures resistant or immune to fire take that damage. Further, if someone that the flame steward does not wish to harm is within the area of the firefan, that character suffers no damage.
- **Flames of Healing:** By calling upon the Sacred Flame, any cure spell cast by the flame steward cures an additional +1 hp per die (so a *cure moderate wounds* heals an additional +2, a *cure serious* heals an additional +3, and so on). This is a supernatural ability.
- ***Sacred Flame Strike:*** At 6th level, the flame steward can call forth a column of flame from above as a spell-like ability. This is exactly like the spell *flame strike* except that if someone that the flame steward does not wish to harm is within the area of the *sacred flame strike*, that character suffers no damage.
- ***Purging Flames:*** At 8th level, once per day, the flame steward can call upon the Sacred Flame to cast one of the following spells: *heal, restoration, atonement,* or *remove curse.* This is a spell-like ability.
- ***Sacred Firestorm:*** Once per day, as a spell-like ability, the 10th-level flame steward can create a powerful storm of sacred flame. This works like the spell *firestorm* except that half of the damage is divine power rather than simply fire, so even creatures resistant or immune to fire take that damage. Further, if someone that the flame steward does not wish to harm is within the area of the *firestorm*, that character suffers no damage.

FLAME STEWARD SPELL LIST

1ST

bless
cure light wounds
endure elements
light
summon monster (fire only)

2ND

consecrate
continual flame
cure moderate wounds
resist elements
summon monster II (fire only)

3RD

cure serious wounds
protection from elements
remove blindness/deafness
remove disease
summon monster III (fire only)

4TH

cure critical wounds
quench
searing light
summon monster IV (fire only)

5TH

fire shield
healing circle
summon monster V (fire only)
wall of fire

CLASS SKILLS

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

The flame steward's class skills (organized by key ability) are:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
		Concentration	Craft Knowledge (any) Spellcraft	Profession	Diplomacy Heal

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a flame steward, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Alignment: Any non-evil
Heal ranks: 8
Knowledge (religion) ranks: 5
Knowledge (arcana) ranks: 5
Feats: Endurance, Power Attack

The Foes of STORMWEATHER

The *Villains of The Shattered Mask*

by Richard Lee Byers • illustrated by Wayne Reynolds

Magically cloaked in the gigantic frame, batlike wings, and maroon scales of a pit fiend, and a steel mask as well, Marance Talendar walked the winding path and mused on the strangeness of encountering love in Hell. The breeze carried the tang of brimstone and the shrieks of damned souls. Ugly fortresses of basalt and iron loomed against the red and starless sky. But here in the center of the infernal city of Dis bloomed a garden of velvety black foliage, of lotuses, orchids, and fungal topiaries shining with their own light, and within its secluded bowers, the aristocracy of the devil folk called baatezu dallied and coupled.

The wizard turned down a branching path. It led him to the bower where Kartha waited. A hulking horror to human eyes, yet uncommonly beautiful by the standards of her own race, the female pit fiend had adorned herself by scoring her hide with her talons.

She rose, beaming, and he strode to meet her.

Kartha held out her hands, then, as he reached for them, pulled them back. Bending low, she crossed them on her breast in a formal obeisance. She knew how to tease. No wonder Marance's master the archduke adored her.

The wizard frowned. "If you want to observe the proprieties, we could have met at the palace."

Kartha laughed. "Patience, Your Grace. It will be all the sweeter if we don't rush."

"We don't have to rush, my lady. But I didn't sneak away from my own guards to be balked again."

Kartha smiled. "No. You slipped away so we could be truly alone. As was my wish, and I intend to express my gratitude."

"I like the sound of that."

"Then come." She drew him down onto a bed of soft, viridescent moss. "Let me delight all your senses, beginning with taste." She poured amber wine into a golden chalice.

He drank, then ate of the viands she claimed to have prepared with her own hands. Afterwards, she bade him lie on his stomach so she could massage him. He surmised what was about to happen, and he was right.

The knife plunged through the substance of his illusory body, popping it like an inflated bladder, and struck the spell of warding he'd cast on his true flesh. The spell bounced the knife away and blinked out of existence. As he scrambled clear, he saw the blade shimmering with death magic. Probably it had been specifically enchanted to slay the archduke.

Kartha gawked at him. "The human!" As the only representative of his race ever to rise high in the archduke's service, Marance was accustomed to being spoken of in such a manner.

"Yes. I recommend you surrender and tell me which of the archduke's enemies put you up to this."

She sneered. "You have no witnesses. If you accuse me of wrongdoing, your lord won't believe you."

"He will when he inspects that dagger. It now bears a trace of your essence."

She snarled and sprang at him.

Marance conjured a blast a freezing cold. It staggered and blinded her, and she blundered past clawing at nothing.

She wiped the frost from her eyes, spun around, and thrust her hands out at him. A spark shot from them, struck him, and exploded into flame.

Leaving him unscathed. He would scarcely have hunted a pit fiend without warding himself against fireballs. He cast darts of force at her, and she staggered.

She charged again and again, and his magic repelled her every time.
He smiled, for it was almost too easy.

Abruptly, he realized it *was* too easy. With the powers at her disposal, Kartha would never fight so mindlessly. He had been assailing an illusion, while she had become invisible and maneuvered to take him by surprise.

As he whirled, he sensed her dagger poised to stab him, but from what quarter, he couldn't tell. Unable to aim at her, his only recourse was to cast a spell that would damage everything in a given area, centered on himself.

Balls of ice rained down from the empty air, stinging, hard enough to break bone. One hit him on the head, knocking him down. Everything went dark for a moment, and he clung to consciousness by sheer will.

When his vision cleared, Kartha was lying insensible. Perhaps she'd succumbed because she was already wounded. At any rate, he'd caught her.

Three hours later, he knelt before the throne. The archduke regarded him impassively.

"You intercepted a note meant for me," the devil said. "You impersonated me. These acts are treasons."

"I had no alternative. I tried to warn you about the courtesan, but you were besotted. Had I permitted it, you would have kept that rendezvous and died."

"There is that," said the archduke, grinning suddenly. He gestured for Marance to rise. "So ask me for a boon, wizard."

Marance smiled. He thought it quite a mild, pleasant smile, and was surprised when the archduke flinched.

"I want to go home."

MARANCE TALENDAR

Appearance: Marance is a compactly built man of middle height. He has a pale, patrician face with a high, broad forehead, narrow nose, thin lips, and a pointed chin, and he is handsome in a cold, intellectual way. His hands are white and delicate, almost the hands of a lady. Since his return to the realm of the living, he has opted to dress plainly and unremarkably in a deep blue fustian cloak and buckram robe, as if he were an itinerant spellcaster of no extraordinary talent. When wandering the streets, he generally conceals his identity behind a crescent-shaped papier-mâché mask of the Man in the Moon. In Selgaunt, with its love of revels, mischief, and intrigue, such a disguise rarely draws a second glance. Within the shadowed sockets of the false face shine Marance's most unusual feature, deep-set eyes with irises so pearly a gray they're virtually white. This is not a stigma of his passage into death and back again, but rather the coloration he was born with.

Background: A quarter of a century ago, Marance the gifted young wizard and his warrior brother Nuldrevyn were the brightest, boldest lights among the new generation of the Talendar, one of the great merchant-noble Houses of the Sembian seaport of Selgaunt. When Thamalon Uskevren, leader of their family's traditional rivals (see "Rogues Gallery: The Heroes of Stormweather," *DRAGON*, July, 2000) returned from years of exile to reestablish his House in the city, the two siblings vowed to stop him. They planned to launch a series of clandestine raids to steal or destroy Thamalon's goods, massacre his chattels, and, with a bit of luck, slay the upstart himself.

Unfortunately, the canny Thamalon and his doughty retainers managed to defend themselves against the worst the Talendar brothers could do. Finally, one night in the midst of battle, the Uskevren lord killed Marance.

MARANCE TALENDAR

Male Human 20th-level Wizard

Strength	11 (+0)	Fort. Save	+7	Armor Class	13
Dexterity	17 (+3)	Ref. Save	+9	Flat-footed AC	10
Constitution	13 (+1)	Will Save	+13	Touch AC	13
Intelligence	20 (+5)	Alignment	LE		
Wisdom	13 (+1)	Speed	30 ft.		
Charisma	13 (+1)	Size	M (5 ft. 10 in.)		
Hit Points	90	Melee Attack	+10/+5	Ranged Attack	+13/+8

SPELLS (4/6/5/5/5/5/4/4/4/4) from the following list:
(Marance's favorite spells are highlighted.)

0 level: all, but favorites include ***ray of frost, light, detect magic***

1st level: *cause fear,* ***shield, grease,*** *mage armor, magic missile, message,* ***summon monster I, charm person,*** *silent image,* ***chill touch, feather fall, reduce***

2nd level: *arcane lock, ghoul touch,* ***protection from arrows, summon monster II,*** *summon swarm,* ***invisibility,*** *minor image,* ***darkvision, knock, levitate,*** *web*

3rd level: ***dispel magic, magic circle against good, sleet storm, summon monster III, suggestion, lightning bolt, wind wall, invisibility sphere, major image, vampiric touch, fly, shrink item***

4th level: ***minor globe of invulnerability, Evard's black tentacles, summon monster IV, arcane eye, scrying, ice storm, Otiluke's resilient sphere, wall of ice, improved invisibility***

5th level: *dominate person, magic jar, nightmare,* ***lesser planar binding, summon monster V, contact other plane, cone of cold, telekinesis***

6th level: ***globe of invulnerability, greater dispelling, planar binding, summon monster VI, legend lore, chain lightning, disintegrate, eyebite, move earth,*** *true seeing*

7th level: ***summon monster VII,*** *spell turning,* ***greater scrying, vision, mass invisibility,*** *plane shift,* ***finger of death***

8th level: ***greater planar binding,*** *maze, Otto's irresistible dance, polymorph any object, power word–blind,* ***summon monster VIII***

9th level: *energy drain, meteor swarm, gate,* ***summon monster IX,*** *wish*

Skills: Alchemy +15, Concentration +28, Diplomacy +4, Gather Information +3, Hide +6, Knowledge (arcana) +22, Knowledge (religion) +10, Knowledge (nature) +11, Knowledge (the planes) +28, Listen +3, Move Silently +5, Ride +5, Scry +25, Search +7, Sense Motive +3, Speak Language (Aquan), Spellcraft +24, Spot +3, Swim +2, Wilderness Lore +3.

Feats: Alertness, Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Rod, Craft Staff, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Endurance, Forge Ring, Iron Will, Leadership, Scribe Scroll, Weapon Focus (quarterstaff).

Languages: Common, Abyssal, Aquan, Celestial, Draconic, Infernal, Undercommon.

Possessions*: *Quarterstaff of pain, dust of slumber* (six doses), *rings of plane shifting.* For descriptions of these magic items, see page 88.

***TO BE A BALANCED NPC OF HIS LEVEL, MARANCE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL ITEMS:**
bag of holding (Bag 1), *+3 bracers of armor, winged boots, wand of magic missile* (9th-level caster), *+2 amulet of natural armor, pearl of power* (2nd level), *pearl of power* (3rd level).

Marance's Magic and Related Matters: Marance cannot be turned by a cleric, nor will a *detect undead* spell sniff him out. Nonetheless, he is not alive in the same way that ordinary people are (see Background). He doesn't need food, water, air, or sleep, although he must meditate to regain spells. However, every time he uses 8th or 9th level magic, his Constitution drops by one point permanently. When it reaches 0, he will lose his hold on earthly existence and return to the Nine Hells. (Marance believes that his lord put this limitation on him to ensure that he could not remain in the world of the living forever. Actually, even lesser spells drain a tiny, irreplaceable bit of his vital energy, but this isn't relevant for game purposes.)

Marance's spirit descended to the Nine Hells, where he underwent an agonizing period of torment. Eventually the spirit Bileworm, discerning the damned soul's magical abilities, rescued him from the fire pits and brought him to the archduke of the infernal city of Dis. The baatezu lord took Marance into his service.

In the years that followed, Marance learned many arcane secrets and rose to be one of the grandees of Dis, perhaps the only non-baatezu ever to do so. But he never forgot his death at Thamalon's hands, and always he yearned for revenge.

Finally the archduke gave Marance permission to return to the mortal world and seek satisfaction. Upon his arrival, the wizard made contact with his brother Nuldrevyn, now patriarch of House Talendar. Though taken aback by Marance's reappearance, Nuldrevyn agreed to help him destroy the hated Uskevren. Marance now dwells in secret in the Old High Hall, the Talendar citadel, hatching his schemes.

Roleplaying Notes: Marance generally comes across as courteous, intelligent, and reasonable, soft-spoken and mild-mannered, a bookish and rather dispassionate sort. He prides himself on his composure, and only when extremely provoked will he display so much as a flicker of agitation or violent emotion. In reality, Marance possesses an iron will and can be utterly ruthless and unscrupulous in the pursuit of important objectives. And no goal is more important to him than the destruction of the Uskevren, which he pursues with characteristic patience and calculation.

When danger threatens, Marance takes considerable pains to preserve himself from harm. If he deems his participation unnecessary, he will hold himself aloof from a battle and let his henchmen and summoned minions do all the fighting. When he does think it essential to enter the fray, he still does his level best to protect himself. He hurls magic sheltered behind the ranks of his troops or perched atop a tall building, warded with defensive spells like *protection from arrows* and *globe of invulnerability*.

This attitude stems not from cowardice but rather from a simple distaste for physical confrontation along with a sound sense of tactics. If forced into hand-to-hand combat, he will fight courageously with his enchanted quarterstaff.

Because of the damage to his Constitution, Marance will not cast 8th- and 9th-level spells except when needed to preserve his life or when he's certain they will serve to destroy one of the Uskevren. On those occasions, he will cast them freely, since, despite his infernal master's suspicions to the contrary, he has no desire to remain in the mortal world once his vengeance is complete. He is similarly reluctant to use his rings to return to Dis, since he has no idea how long he would have to remain there before the archduke granted him leave to return to the realm of the living. Nonetheless, he will employ them if he deems it necessary to preserve his existence.

Using Marance in Your Campaign: Heroes who are friends to the Uskevren are bound to experience violent encounters with Marance or at least his agents. Typically, these malefactors will be attempting to assassinate the nobles of House Uskevren.

If the characters are not allied with House Uskevren, they might first encounter Marance as a potential ally. If permitted, he might join their party for a time because he has use for a particular magic item in a certain well-defended treasure trove. If so, he is likely to prove both a useful companion and agreeable company.

The adventurers might even enter the service of the Talendar. The Talendar are a more villainous House than many others in Selgaunt, but this won't be readily apparent to an outlander. In time, such characters will be assigned to aid Marance, who will treat them well.

In either of the latter two scenarios is used, it should take a while before the players realize that Marance is a damned soul. At that point, they face an ethical dilemma. If the wizard has been their friend, or if they've pledged their fealty to House Talendar, is it honorable to turn their coats, even given what they now know? Ultimately, though, Marance should plan or do something so dastardly that the heroes have no real choice but to stand against him.

Once the characters begin to oppose Marance, he could prove to be one of their deadliest enemies. But though he could kill any of the heroes without hesitation or regret, he won't hate them. He's far too obsessed with the Uskevren to devote much emotion to anyone else. Therefore, he might attempt to remove the adventurers from his path through bribery, blackmail, or sending them a map to a fabulous treasure hidden halfway across the continent.

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

QUARTERSTAFF OF PAIN

This +3 quarterstaff crackles with eerie purple flames when wielded in combat. Those struck who fail a Will save (DC 20) are paralyzed as if affected by *hold monster* for 9 rounds.

Caster level: 9th
Prerequisites: Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *hold monster*
Market price: 72,300 gp
Cost to Create: 36,150 gp + 2,892 XP.

DUST OF SLUMBER

When scattered by hand or dispersed through a blowgun, the dust causes effects identical to those of a *sleep* spell cast by a 3rd-level sorcerer.

Caster level: 3rd
Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous item, *sleep*
Market price: 50 gp/dose
Cost to Create: 25 gp + 2 XP/dose.

RINGS OF PLANE SHIFTING

When clicked together, these rings cause user to *plane shift* to the stronghold of a pit fiend in Baator. Since both rings must be worn to activate the magic, they take up two effective "ring slots" (see Limit on Magic Items Worn on page 176 in the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). In addition, the rings can be reattuned to another single location. Reattuning the rings requires the wearer to be very familiar with the location, as described under the *teleport* spell on page 264 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Caster level: 13th
Prerequisites: Forge Ring, *plane shift, word of recall*
Market price: 136,500 gp
Cost to Create: 68,250 gp + 5,460 XP.

NULDREVYN TALENDAR

Appearance: Nuldrevyn is a gaunt old man with the shrewd, sardonic face and long legs characteristic of the Talendar family. His eyes are green. Most of his white hair has fallen out. A devoted horseman, he is often noticeably stiff and gimpy after long hours in the saddle. Nonetheless, he is too concerned with presenting an appearance of strength to ride in a coach or litter, or to use a cane.

Background: In his youth, Nuldrevyn was a firebrand eager for any adventure. Together with his beloved brother Marance, he led caravans through brigand- and orc-infested territory, and fought pirates aboard his family's galleys and caravels. He particularly relished hostilities against rival Houses, whether in formal duels, impromptu brawls, or anonymously playing the bandit himself and raiding their mercantile ventures. In time, his taste for swashbuckling led him into a clandestine war against Thamalon Uskevren.

That conflict ended when Thamalon slew Marance. Shock and grief began to alter Nuldrevyn's perspective, and age has completed the transformation. In his twilight years, he is a fair-dealing merchant who rules the Talendar cautiously and conservatively, generally avoiding risk. Still, he has neither forgotten nor forgiven his family's traditional enemies, and when Marance returned from the dead to destroy the Uskevren, Nuldrevyn gave him his blessing, with the understanding that the world at large must never learn that the Talendar were responsible for their foes' demise.

Roleplaying Notes: To most people, Nuldrevyn seems a shrewd, courtly, and kindly old codger, and that perception is valid as far as it goes. But he can be ruthless to protect or advance his family interests. He is extremely fond of his many children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, especially his youngest son Ossian.

Nuldrevyn's physical powers are failing, and his days as a fighter are long behind him. He will avoid combat if possible, leaving the swordplay to his bodyguards, but he fights courageously if cornered.

He has a great fear of snakes, a weakness that he has concealed from nearly everyone.

Using Nuldrevyn in Your Campaign: While Marance is on the scene and the PCs are fighting him, Nuldrevyn is their enemy, pure and simple. But if they succeed in sending the wizard back to the grave, they might in time develop a more complex, ambivalent relationship with the Talendar patriarch, one reflecting the sophisticated, Machiavellian quality of life among the aristocrats of Selgaunt.

At times, Nuldrevyn sends agents to attack the Uskevren or other sympathetic characters, or to exploit innocent commoners, and then he will be an adversary again, albeit one whom the heroes can never have arrested, or attempt to kill without being deemed outlaws by the Sembian authorities. On other occasions, however, Nuldrevyn and Thamalon might actually cooperate in a business venture, or temporarily join forces against a powerful mutual enemy. The Talendar lord, who is one of the city fathers and conscientious about his responsibilities, might undertake a beneficial public project. On such occasions, the heroes might see fit to help him.

It is also possible that in time one of younger Talendar, someone far more villainous than Nuldrevyn, will try to assassinate him and seize control of the House. If the adventurers get wind of the plot, they might want to save Nuldrevyn on the grounds that his would-be successor poses a much greater threat.

NULDREVYN TALENDAR

Male Human 7th-level Fighter, 6th-level Aristocrat

Strength	8 (-1)	Fort. Save	+7	Armor Class	8
Dexterity	7 (-2)	Ref. Save	+2	Flat-footed AC	8
Constitution	10 (+0)	Will Save	+9	Touch AC	8
Intelligence	14 (+2)	Alignment	N		
Wisdom	14 (+2)	Speed	30 ft.		
Charisma	14 (+2)	Size	M (6 ft. 1 in.)		
Hit Points	58	Melee Attack	+10/+1	Ranged Attack	+9/+0

Skills: Appraise +11, Bluff +10, Climb +8, Diplomacy +11, Handle Animal +12, Intimidate +10, Jump +9, Ride +8, Sense Motive +10, Speak Language (Aquan), Swim +8.

Feats: Leadership, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (dagger), Weapon Focus (lance), Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (dagger), Weapon Specialization (lance), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

Languages: Common, Aquan, Dwarven, Gnome.

Possessions*: The House of Talendar possesses many magic items, but Nuldrevyn doesn't usually carry any of them. He does keep a dagger secreted about his person.

***TO BE A BALANCED NPC OF HIS LEVEL, NULDREVYN SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL ITEMS:**

+2 full plate, +1 large steel shield, +2 longsword, +1 dagger, +1 lance, +2 amulet of natural armor, boots of speed, +2 cloak of resistance, +1 ring of protection, potion of cure moderate wounds (×2), *potion of endurance, potion of bull's strength.*

OSSIAN TALENDAR

Male Human 5th-level Aristocrat, 2nd-level Rogue

Strength	14 (+2)	Fort. Save	+1	Armor Class	12
Dexterity	14 (+2)	Ref. Save	+6	Flat-footed AC	10
Constitution	10 (+0)	Will Save	+5	Touch AC	12
Intelligence	13 (+1)	Alignment	N		
Wisdom	12 (+1)	Speed	30 ft.		
Charisma	15 (+2)	Size	M (6 ft.)		
Hit Points	33	Melee Attack	+6	Ranged Attack	+6

Skills: Bluff +9, Diplomacy +9, Disguise +8, Gather Information +9, Hide +7, Innuendo +6, Intimidate +9, Move Silently +7, Ride +8, Sense Motive +7, Speak Language (Aquan), Swim +7.
Feats: Leadership, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (dagger), Weapon Focus (longsword).
Special: Sneak attack +1d6, evasion.
Languages: Common, Aquan, Elven.
Possessions*: Ossian has access to most of the magic items stored in the Talendar citadel, but he does not usually carry any of them.

*TO BE A BALANCED NPC OF HIS LEVEL, OSSIAN SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL ITEMS:

+1 studded leather, +1 buckler, +1 cloak of resistance, potion of cure light wounds (×2), *potion of hiding, potion of cat's grace, potion of darkvision* (×2), masterwork longsword, masterwork dagger, masterwork mighty composite longbow (+2) with 20 masterwork arrows.

OSSIAN TALENDAR

Appearance: Ossian has the classic Talendar looks. He's lean and long-legged with a clever, sardonic, and rather appealing face. His hair is a mop of ginger curls, and his eyes are green. A stylish young man, he generally dresses in the height of fashion, although not on occasions when fancy clothes would be inappropriate. Occasionally, when a new style is particularly frilly, impractical, or otherwise ridiculous, he has his tailor make him an outfit that someone as witty and sartorially savvy as himself will recognize as a wicked parody of the current mode.

Background: Ossian's intelligence and energy were apparent early on, and recognizing them, his father began grooming him to play a major role in guiding the fortunes of House Talendar. The boy delighted in this attention and happily tackled every challenge and responsibility Nuldrevyn laid before him. He learned to manage others through inspiration, guile, and intimidation. He learned to read their thoughts in the flex of a finger or the twitch of an eyelid, to cut and parry with the warrior's sword, pluck the strings of the courtier's lute, flick the beads of the merchant's abacus, and when necessary, to sear and tear with the torturer's white-hot pincers.

When Ossian reached his majority, Nuldrevyn gave him a particularly important and dangerous job. House Talendar had long ago formed secret alliances with certain of Selgaunt's outlaw fraternities, and henceforth Ossian would serve as his father's emissary to the criminal element.

When he ventured into the stews, thieves' dens, and smugglers' lairs, Ossian discovered that his position as his father's representative won him entry, but not respect. That could only be gained by answering a sneer with a sneer, a taunt with a taunt, and a blow with a blow; by plunging fearlessly into senseless brawls and roistering, madcap pranks that sometimes left a participant maimed or worse; by leaving a would-be bully or two dead on the tavern floor. Ossian was equal to the challenge. Indeed, he thrived on it, and, once he'd established himself among them, even prevailed on the housebreakers and cutpurses to teach him some of their craft.

Since Nuldrevyn doesn't want the Talendar implicated in Marance's campaign against the Uskevren, the wizard can't use his brother's household troops for henchmen. Thus, Ossian has been directed to recruit a force of ruffians from the underworld.

Roleplaying Notes: Ossian is bright, lively, cheerful, and friendly. He's also fiercely ambitious, and he aspires to succeed his beloved father as Talendar patriarch. He expects to earn this honor through devoted service to his House, and hopes that, by aiding in the destruction of the Uskevren, he will rise so high in Nuldrevyn's favor that the old man will name him his heir.

Inwardly, Ossian doesn't feel much hatred for the Uskevren or the other rival Houses, nor is he cruel by nature. Nonetheless, he will gladly aid Marance if that is his father's will.

Cool-headed and prudent, Ossian really has no great love of combat, and when a fellow aristocrat tries to call him out, generally seeks to defuse the situation with a smile and a joke. Nonetheless, he doesn't lack for courage, and will fight bravely when necessary. Indeed, he will take extraordinary risks if he thinks it essential to defend his House or further his ambitions.

AVOS THE FISHER

Appearance: Avos is a blond, square-jawed hulk of a man with fair skin and piggy, pale blue eyes. He exudes strength, arrogance, and brutality. He likes to affect the appearance of a simple fisherman, sporting the sandals, slop-hose, and open, sleeveless tunic that such folk often wear in mild weather.

Background: Avos was born among the fisher folk of Selgaunt, but ran away at an early age to join the city's underworld. Thanks to his great strength and savage temperament, he soon found success as a strong-arm robber and killer for hire. In time, he joined the Quippers, killed their chieftain in a duel, and so became their leader himself.

Named for a dangerous species of freshwater fish, the Quippers are one of Selgaunt's oldest criminal fraternities, with well-established traditions, rituals, and laws. They control most of the crime on the waterfront, and also rule the Scab, the city's most notorious slum. Their lair is in this district, inside a crumbling brownstone tenement.

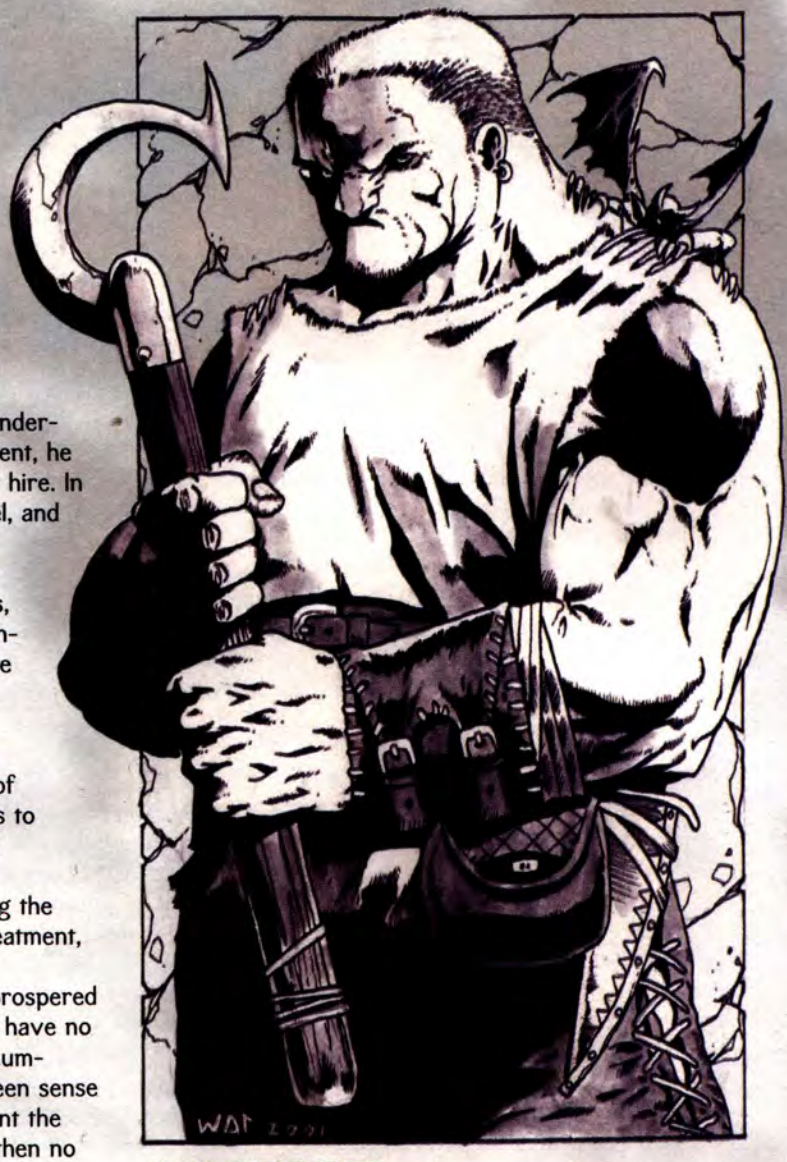
The Quippers have a secret alliance with the House of Talendar, and when Ossian asked Avos to supply a band of bravos to assist a mysterious masked wizard in his efforts to destroy the Uskevren, the outlaw was happy to oblige—in exchange for a substantial fee, of course.

Roleplaying Notes: Avos is the consummate bully, ruling the Quippers with an iron hand. Some of them resent this treatment, but few dare to say so to his face.

Avos is also merciless and cunning, and the gang has prospered under his rule. He has no capacity for loyalty, and would have no compunction about betraying anyone under the right circumstances. But he would not do so capriciously. He has a keen sense of where his long-terms interests lie, and he does not want the Quippers to acquire a reputation for untrustworthiness—then no one would want to do business with them.

Avos enjoys hurting people and showing off his prowess, and dishonorable brute that he is, he also likes to have an edge in any combat. Thus, he forces disloyal gang members and selected captives to fight him in a particular manner. The combatants duel wielding a short sword in one hand and a fishing gaff in the other. Avos has trained himself to be a master at this peculiar mode of fighting, and since nobody else is, the outlaw always has a huge advantage.

FISHING GAFF (Medium-size exotic weapon)
A fishing gaff is a 4-foot length of wood with a barbed metal hook at the end. The gaff is a Medium-size weapon that deals 1d6 points of damage with a successful hit, with a ×3 critical threat range. In addition, because of the fishing gaff's curved hook, a proficient wielder can make trip attacks with it at a +2 bonus. If the wielder is tripped during his own trip attempt, he can drop the gaff to avoid being tripped. Finally, when using a fishing gaff, the wielder gets a +2 bonus on his opposed attack rolls when attempting to disarm an opponent (including the roll to avoid being disarmed if he fails to disarm his opponent).



AVOS THE FISHER

Male Human 9th-level Fighter, 2nd-level Rogue

Strength	20 (+5)	Fort. Save	+10	Armor Class	11
Dex	12 (+1)	Ref. Save	+7	Flat-footed AC	10
Constitution	18 (+4)	Will Save	+3	Touch AC	11
Intelligence	12 (+1)	Alignment	NE		
Wisdom	10 (+0)	Speed	30 ft.		
Charisma	13 (+1)	Size	M (6 ft. 6 in.)		
Hit Points	105	Melee Attack	+15/+9	Ranged Attack	+11/+5

Skills: Appraise +7, Bluff +9, Climb +17, Diplomacy +4, Gather Information +7, Hide +6, Intimidate +8, Jump +17, Move Silently +6, Sense Motive +5, Spot +5, Swim +17.
Feats: Ambidexterity, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (fishing gaff), Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Leadership, Power Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (fishing gaff), Weapon Focus (short sword), Weapon Specialization (fishing gaff), Weapon Specialization (short sword).
Special: Sneak attack +1d6, evasion.
Languages: Common, Aquan, Thieves Cant.
Possessions*: Fishing gaff (see below), short sword.

*TO BE A BALANCED NPC OF HIS LEVEL, AVOS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL ITEMS:
+2 chain shirt, +1 buckler, +1 short sword, +1 mighty composite shortbow (+5), +2 cloak of resistance, +1 ring of protection, boots of spider climbing, potion of cure moderate wounds (×2), *potion of endurance, potion of bull's strength,* masterwork fishing gaff.

VS. TREANTS

BY WOLFGANG BAUR

"The treants are not just the strongest enemies you could make in a forest—they are the forest."
—Tandellin Glonedrigel, Elven ranger

Treants are the ferocious guardians of the forests, and the enemies of anyone wielding an ax, fire, or saw. Even good-aligned parties are likely to run afoul of them by lighting campfires, cutting down timber to build a raft, or cutting a path through tangled underbrush. Treants don't want to be at war with every visitor to the woods, but they are zealous in defense of those towering trees unable to defend themselves.

PREPARATION

Wood is Immune: Treants are immune to many common attacks: they cannot be poisoned or paralyzed, they cannot be stunned or put to sleep, and their woody plant bodies are not subject to critical hits.

Scout: Because they are hard to see among the trees, it's possible to engage a single treant that the party might be able to handle easily, not realizing that there are dozens more all around you. Be wary of treant allies; if you are going to cut a road through a forest, find out what animals and druids might be allied with the treants. Scout the encounter and have a path of retreat, such as a road, a spell, or a riverboat. Treants don't swim, but they can ford rivers up to 15 feet deep.

Watch Carefully: While it might seem impossible to miss an opponent who stands 20 or 30 feet high, it is possible to miss the treant for the trees. With their leafy limbs and perfectly bark-like skin, they can be incredibly hard to see among trees and brush. Add to this the fact that treants often animate a "decoy" tree to draw an opponent's attention while they creep up from another direction, and you can see why a treant ambush can be deadly.

Size Matters: Bring weapons that cause normal damage. These include slashing weapons such as axes and swords, or bludgeoning weapons such as maces and quarterstaves. All piercing weapons (such as spears and arrows) cause only half damage to treants.

Talk them Down: Sometimes, a druid or an elf can convince a treant that no harm was intended, and the dwarf with the axe is just a coincidence. But don't be fooled by a treant's alignment—they won't back down if your party started a wildfire while slaying orcs.

TACTICS

Fight in the Open: Don't count on concealment or cover within the woods; treants can see through most attempts to hide and have excellent hearing. Don't let a treant or a grove of treants trap you in the thickest part of the forest. Meet the treants on open ground, such as a clearing, a rocky slope with few trees, or even along a marshy stream or river. You might have trouble with the terrain, but that is more than made up for by the fact that the treants won't be able to turn every tree and branch against you.

Avoid Ranged Weapon Attacks: They don't cause much damage, and they give treants time to animate the forest against you.

Don't climb: Treants can animate the trees right beneath you.

Fight with Mobility: Consider fighting a running battle against a treant from a distance (with traps or fire spells). But be careful. This tactic can turn against you if the treant manages to capture one party member while the others are too far to help.

Burn them Out: Yes, it will enrage them further, but if you are already fighting, the extra fire damage is crucial. Treants hate fire—use this against them. Threaten them with torches, flaming oil, alchemist's fire, and magical fire, from *burning hands* to *fireball* to *incendiary cloud*. This is one of their few vulnerabilities—exploit it as much as possible. If you have a cleric or wizard capable of casting fire spells, make sure she's protected—she will be the treant's primary target. Be aware that setting the forest on fire will draw the attention of other treants in the area, elves, druids, and other forest creatures.

Fight Up Close: Watch out for their long branches—with a 15-foot reach, treants can hit you long before you can hit them. Expect attacks of opportunity as you approach, but get in close as fast as possible. Rushing a lone treant in a group at least ensures that only one of you will be subject to an attack of opportunity. Mobility, Spring Attack, and other feats can protect you from the attacks of opportunity you'll draw approaching or retreating from a treant.

Don't Get Underfoot: Once you are in close, you might be subject to trample attacks. Try to attack from several directions rather than one, so that a single trample doesn't engulf the entire party.

Run: Finally, if you are attacked by animated trees, run away. The trees animated by a treant move at a speed of 10—much slower than the treants themselves, and can be left behind quickly. For treants, the forest is a weapon—fight the creature behind the weapon, not the weapon itself.

VS. TREANTS TIPS

- Be prepared by assessing how many treants and their allies might be in the area.
- Avoid using piercing weapons, such as spears.
- Choose the battlefield carefully.
- Use fire-based attacks.
- Consider hit-and-run tactics.

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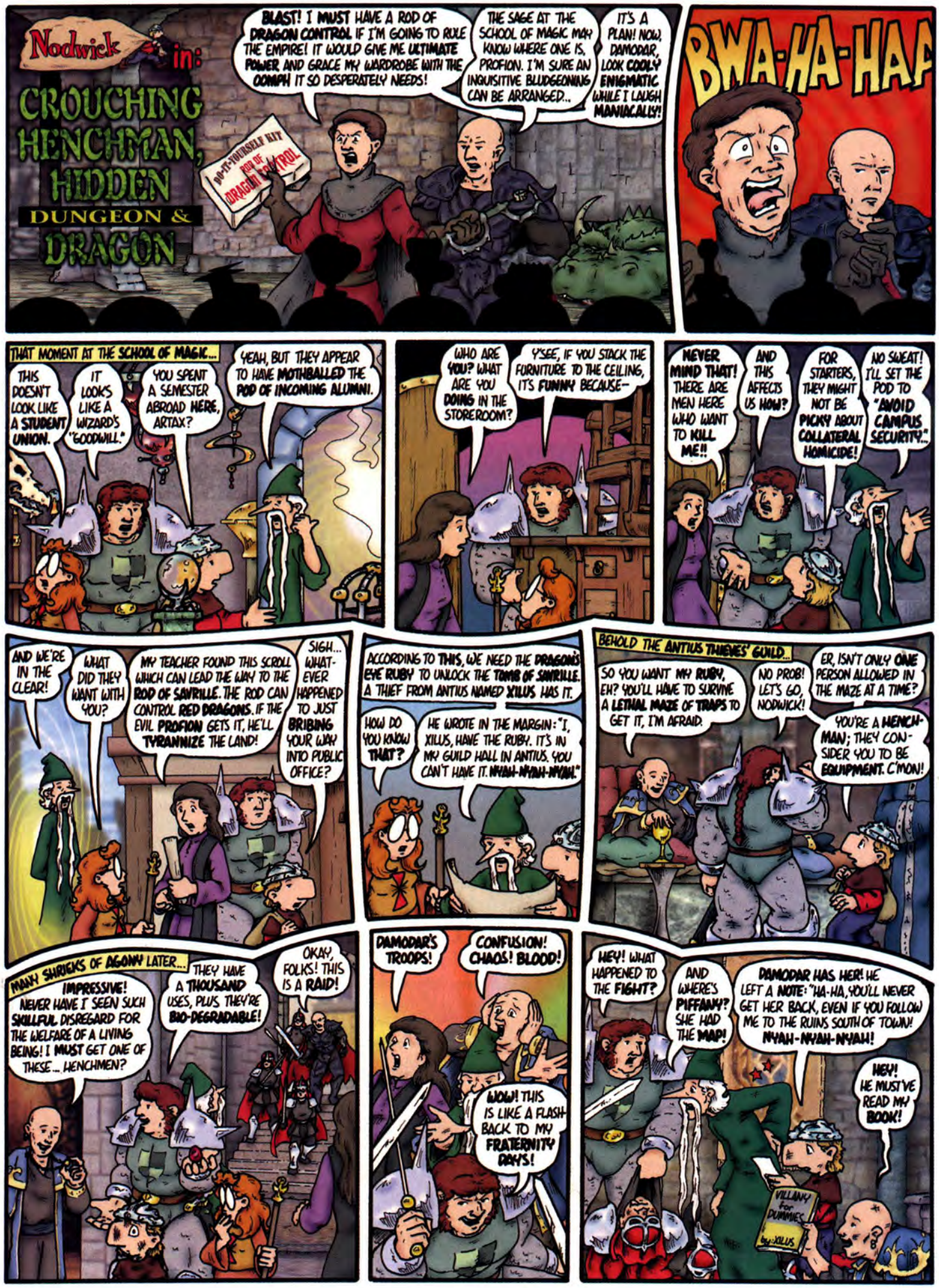
Nodwick in:
CROUCHING HENCHMAN, HIDDEN DUNGEON & DRAGON
BLAST! I MUST HAVE A ROD OF DRAGON CONTROL IF I'M GOING TO RULE THE EMPIRE! IT WOULD GIVE ME ULTIMATE POWER AND GRACE MY WARDROBE WITH THE OOMPH IT SO DESPERATELY NEEDS!
THE SAGE AT THE SCHOOL OF MAGIC MAY KNOW WHERE ONE IS, PROFION. I'M SURE AN INQUISITIVE BLUDGEONING CAN BE ARRANGED...
IT'S A PLAN! NOW, DAMODAR, LOOK COOLY ENIGMATIC WHILE I LAUGH MANIACALLY!
DO-IT-YOURSELF KIT ROD OF DRAGON CONTROL
BWA-HA-HAH
THAT MOMENT AT THE SCHOOL OF MAGIC...
THIS DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A STUDENT UNION.
IT LOOKS LIKE A WIZARD'S "GOODWILL."
YOU SPENT A SEMESTER ABROAD HERE, ARTAX?
YEAH, BUT THEY APPEAR TO HAVE MOTHBALLED THE POD OF INCOMING ALUMNI.
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THE STOREROOM?
Y'SEE, IF YOU STACK THE FURNITURE TO THE CEILING, IT'S FUNNY BECAUSE--
NEVER MIND THAT! THERE ARE MEN HERE WHO WANT TO KILL ME!!
AND THIS AFFECTS US HOW?
FOR STARTERS, THEY MIGHT NOT BE PICKY ABOUT COLLATERAL HOMICIDE!
NO SWEAT! I'LL SET THE POD TO "AVOID CAMPUS SECURITY."
AND WE'RE IN THE CLEAR!
WHAT DID THEY WANT WITH YOU?
MY TEACHER FOUND THIS SCROLL WHICH CAN LEAD THE WAY TO THE ROD OF SAVRILLE. THE ROD CAN CONTROL RED DRAGONS. IF THE EVIL PROFION GETS IT, HE'LL TYRANNIZE THE LAND!
SIGH... WHATEVER HAPPENED TO JUST BRIBING YOUR WAY INTO PUBLIC OFFICE?
ACCORDING TO THIS, WE NEED THE DRAGON'S EYE RUBY TO UNLOCK THE TOMB OF SAVRILLE. A THIEF FROM ANTIUS NAMED XILUS HAS IT.
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
HE WROTE IN THE MARGIN: "I, XILUS, HAVE THE RUBY. IT'S IN MY GUILD HALL IN ANTIUS. YOU CAN'T HAVE IT. NYAH-NYAH-NYAH."
BEHOLD THE ANTIUS THIEVES' GUILD...
SO YOU WANT MY RUBY, EH? YOU'LL HAVE TO SURVIVE A LETHAL MAZE OF TRAPS TO GET IT, I'M AFRAID.
NO PROB! LET'S GO, NODWICK!
ER, ISN'T ONLY ONE PERSON ALLOWED IN THE MAZE AT A TIME?
YOU'RE A HENCHMAN; THEY CONSIDER YOU TO BE EQUIPMENT. C'MON!
MANY SHRIEKS OF AGONY LATER...
IMPRESSIVE! NEVER HAVE I SEEN SUCH SKILLFUL DISREGARD FOR THE WELFARE OF A LIVING BEING! I MUST GET ONE OF THESE... HENCHMEN?
THEY HAVE A THOUSAND USES, PLUS THEY'RE BIO-DEGRADABLE!
OKAY, FOLKS! THIS IS A RAID!
DAMODAR'S TROOPS!
CONFUSION! CHAOS! BLOOD!
WOW! THIS IS LIKE A FLASH-BACK TO MY FRATERNITY DAYS!
HEY! WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FIGHT?
AND WHERE'S PIFFANY? SHE HAD THE MAP!
DAMODAR HAS HER! HE LEFT A NOTE: "HA-HA, YOU'LL NEVER GET HER BACK, EVEN IF YOU FOLLOW ME TO THE RUINS SOUTH OF TOWN! NYAH-NYAH-NYAH!
HEY! HE MUST'VE READ MY BOOK!
VILLANY for DUMMIES by XILUS

DAMODAR BEGINS PIFFANY'S INTERROGATION...
NOW, BE A GOOD GIRL AND TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT THE ROD OF SAVRILLE.
NOPE. YOU'RE AN ICKY-FACE BAD MAN. GO AWAY.
PROFION GAVE ME A LITTLE COMPANION THAT'LL TELL ME WHAT I WANT TO KNOW...
SUNSHINE, LOLLIPOPS AND RAINBOWS, EV'RYTHING THAT'S ...FUL IS WHAT WE'RE ...
LEAVE... NOW...
M'KAY! BYE!
PIFFANY! YOU'RE OKAY! AND YOU HAVE THE MAP!
WHERE'S NODWICK?
UH... HE VALIANTLY DISTRACTED THE BEHOLDERS THAT WERE GUARDING THIS PLACE.
LUCKILY, AN ELVEN TRIAGE TEAM WAS IN THE AREA...
OUR HEROES RUSH TO THE KINGDOM OF THE ELVES...
THANKS FOR PUTTING HIM BACK TOGETHER! Y'KNOW, FOR AN ELF KING, YOU MAKE A PRETTY GOOD DOCTOR!
NOT AT ALL, ROMANA-ER, I MEAN, PIFFANY! WOULD YOU LIKE A JELLY BABY?
AND WE REALLY APPRECIATE YOU MARKING THE ROD'S LOCATION ON OUR MAP!
USING THE DRAGON'S EYE RUBY, THE TOMB OF SAVRILLE IS OPENED...
WHO DARES TO DISTURB THE ROD OF SAVRILLE AND RISKS SHARING MY FATE?
WE'RE JUST THE DELIVERY SERVICE.
OH... WELL, TRY NOT TO POINT THAT THING AT ANYONE; YOU CAN PUT AN EYE OUT OR SOMETHING.
PROFION SCHEMES BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF MAGES...
I DEMAND THAT WE MAGES BE BE GIVEN THE EMPIRE'S ROD OF DRAGON CONTROL! ONLY THEN CAN WE-
HOLD, PROFION! THE EMPIRE IS KEEPING ITS ROD, AND IT'S GETTING THIS ONE AS WELL!
NO!! THAT MEANS THEY'LL BOTH BE IN THE HANDS OF-
DAVE GROSS!
GOODY! NO MORE FUSS ABOUT RED DRAGONS!
THAT'S R-E-A-D DRAGONS. THE ROD OF SAVRILLE GIVES THE USER THE ABILITY TO RE-WRITE ANY BACK ISSUE OF DRAGON MAGAZINE... EXCEPT FOR ARTICLES BY GARY GHGAX. WE'D NEED ABOUT THREE MORE RODS TO SWING THAT...
IT JUST RE-WRITES MAGAZINES? WHAT GOOD IS THAT?
SEE FOR YOURSELF.
WHOA! "SEX AND D&D" BY PHIL FOGLIO! IN PRINT!
AHEM!
OKAY, OKAY... I CHANGED IT BACK.
HUH? WHAT'S WITH THE SNAIL?
WHAT ABOUT PROFION?
HE WAS GOING TO CHANGE ALL THE ARTICLES ABOUT WIZARDS TO MAKE HIMSELF MORE POPULAR THAN ELMINSTER! I'LL USE THE ROD TO ALTER HIS STATS SO HE WON'T BE SUCH A PEST...
"...YOU'VE SAVED THE KINGDOM, WE'RE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL," YADDA, YADDA, YADDA. THEN WE ROLL CREDITS. WHADD'YA THINK?
NO ONE WILL BUY IT. WHAT IF WE USED TWO THIEVES, A DWARF, AND AN ELVEN RANGER INSTEAD?
I LIKE IT... BUT LET'S MAKE ONE OF THE THIEVES REALLY ANNOYING, THEN HAVE HIM KILLED NEAR THE END. THE AUDIENCE WILL LOVE US FOR IT.
SURE. IT BEATS THE HECK OUT OF THAT HENCHMAN IDEA...

PC PORTRAITS

ILLUSTRATED BY DENNIS CRAMER

Dennis's work should be immediately recognized by D&D fans. While being one of the friendliest (if not outright peculiar) people I know, he is also one of the most talented brush and ink artists to ever grace these pages. He draws on ten years of professional experience and has been published by TSR, DC, and Image.

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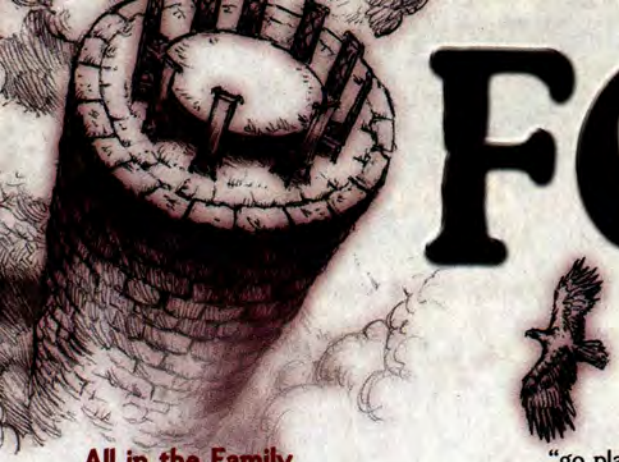

FORUM

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All in the Family

I just finished reading "Scale Mail" in issue #280, and I'm answering the call for more stories of parents teaching their children to play D&D.

I came into the roleplaying world late in life. I was nineteen before I found a group of people that shared my interests and taught me to play. Throughout the years, my lasting friendships have been with fellow roleplayers, all of whom I met through non-roleplaying activities, and I was lucky enough to find a partner for the rest of my life who enjoys a good cerebral campaign or dungeon crawl as much as I do.

I am now over thirty. I have a house, a minivan, a full-time job at the local university, bills (always bills), 2 big dogs, 7 cats, and 1 almost-eleven-year-old son. The year 2000 marked his first experience as a roleplaying gamer.

When the new edition came out, specifically the Dungeons & Dragons game boxed set, I took this as the perfect opportunity not only to revisit the game that birthed my roleplaying life but also to start teaching my child to play. My only wish was that he would enjoy it a little bit and that I would not be wasting time and effort on something he had no interest in.

The gods smiled down! Not only did he attack the game with relish, he pestered me all week about when were we going to play again. Being a parent, I knew how to exploit this.

- If the child wants to game, he has to finish his homework and chores. This used to be an effort of constant nagging and pushing. Now it's simply, "We'll game without you if you're not done." This gives him motivation—and saves my voice for the battle cries.
- It brings the family closer. I've been gaming with my partner since we got together six years ago. It was always "go play quietly" or "it's bedtime" when the group came over to play. Now, not only is game time "together time," but those in-between days are filled with constant dialogue as I help him develop his latest character or clarify something in the *Player's Handbook*.
- It helps with math and spelling. Adding and subtracting all those bonuses and penalties is good practice. When he brings me the list of items he wants to purchase for his character, I check it for spelling. If it's not spelled right, he does not get it. (He gets it after he fixes his spelling—I'm not a complete ogre!)
- When he's been doing well in school and at home, he gets something special, like going to see the *Dungeons & Dragons* movie (and then conning his grandmother into taking him again during winter break).

For Yule, my son got his very own *Player's Handbook*. In his stocking was his first set of dice, a bag to keep them in just like the rest of the family, and a copy of the *Dungeons & Dragons* movie novel. He's on his second reading of the novel, and he's becoming quite adept at using the *Player's Handbook* to familiarize himself with the game mechanics.

Playing D&D has captured my son's imagination as much as reading *Harry Potter*. Although my mother is reading the *Harry Potter* books just like the rest of the family has, I doubt she'll ever want to play D&D. This is something that belongs to just the three of us.

Yes, I came into the roleplaying world late in life. I'm just glad my son didn't have to wait so long.

Elzbeth Maclain • Big Rapids, MI

What's in a Pronoun

I must start by congratulating Wizards of the Coast for putting out a product that managed to not only improve upon a system of rules but that also managed to reignite the creative spark within countless players; it was a job well done. That said, I feel the need to reply to a letter posted in the February 2001 *Dragon* magazine. The letter, whose writer withheld his or her name, was entitled "Agenda?" To grossly paraphrase, this nameless contributor was angered at the use of female pronouns in the new edition of D&D and felt that they were forcing political agendas on the unexpected roleplaying populous; I cannot remember having felt more angry at reading a simple letter.

First, I will direct the contributor of "Agenda?" to read the letter posted directly before that one, a wonderfully written contribution by Julie Ratliff. You could learn a thing or two from her. Second, I want to respond directly to the nameless writer, hopefully without beating a dead horse.

The word "agenda" was what set me off. It took me a long time to figure out exactly why that was, but I knew that was the source of my anger. Nameless writer (NW), no one likes having an agenda forced on them; on that count I can sympathize with you. While I agree with you on this smaller count, I disagree with you on the whole.

"Why is it necessary in every first-person example to use the word 'she?'" It isn't necessary, NW, nor is it true. It is more likely that you, having become so accustomed to seeing only male pronouns, saw the female pronouns sticking out like flares on a dark highway and to the exclusion of the male. The new D&D books alternate the use of male and female pronouns and don't use either exclusively; I suggest you re-read what you have purchased in case you have missed other things.

NW cites the amazon kit from 2nd Edition and the bonus it gives due to men underestimating females. NW's contention is that now, "No player would make that mistake anymore with every other orc warlord being female."

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:
ON WHICH BOOKS AND MOVIES HAVE YOU BASED YOUR D&D CAMPAIGN?

Nowhere in the rules did it state that orcs are as fair about gender as Wizards of the Coast is. Furthermore, even if the rules explicitly stated that one in two orc chieftains is female, you don't have to make it true in your game! The way the rules are presented should have no effect on your game. The rules, in addition to being gender neutral, are also neatly typed, but I do not hear you complaining that orc warlords can no longer be slobs.

Let me get to the heart of the matter. Wizards of the Coast is not shoving a political agenda down the throats of gamers by alternating female and male pronouns. If it is any kind of agenda, it is a marketing agenda, such that Wizards of the Coast wants to include females in the gaming community. Assuming you are male, NW (as I find it hard to imagine a female would have a hard time adjusting to the inclusion of female pronouns), I'd like you to do a little exercise. Imagine that the tables were reversed. Imagine gaming catered exclusively to females. In other words, the images used were ones you would not typically associate with males, and the content used only the feminine form of the pronouns. How would it feel as a male gamer?

Now you see why I get so angry at your calling the inclusion of feminine pronouns an agenda. As the aforementioned Julie Ratliff would say, Wizards of the Coast is now being inclusive rather than exclusive. If anything, the company was trying to be *fair*. And if you have problems with fairness, then that is another issue altogether. But I challenge you to do that little exercise. I challenge you to think about what it must be like for female gamers in a male dominated industry (and world, for that matter). What looks to you like a glaring typo isn't an agenda, and it isn't trying to be politically correct, as you have said. It is simply an acknowledgment of those female gamers out there who have dealt with the passive sexism of the past editions, as well as an invitation to new female gamers, thereby making the world of roleplaying games less hostile to a female audience. NW, you might disagree, but in my mind, any time you make a fellow gamer feel more like a part of the community, that's a good thing.

Jason Moscatello • Lincoln Park, NJ

In Tune With Tracy

Though I have been a player, DM, and fan of D&D for twenty years, this is the first time I've felt compelled to write about something that was printed in *DRAGON:* in issue #281, Monte Cook's letter, and Tracy Hickman's response. First, let me point out that I read Tracy's article in #277 and didn't find anything to suggest that we should all become trouble-making players. (Sorry, Monte.)

What I did find was something I have long been an advocate of and that is the *role*play in our favorite hobby. The first thing I ever learned about this game was that it gives us the opportunity to step outside ourselves, and become the heroes of fantasy—which is exactly what I read Tracy's article and corresponding letter (overlooking the sarcasm of course) to be saying. Having played in some games with Mr. Hickman at GEN CON conventions, including his famous "Killer Breakfast," I can assure you he does not advocate "troublemaking" players in games.

Unfortunately for DMs—and all the nasties we create/design/portray—the heroes don't always do what we want. If they didn't do the unexpected, they wouldn't last very long. Without going into a list of war stories too long for publication, I can safely say that some of the best times in gaming are when someone (or everyone) in the party is playing their character(s) to the hilt.

So what if the party or part of it takes all of the DM's carefully laid plans for ten levels of dungeon crawling and throws them out the window by lowering themselves directly into the heart of the ancient volcano, and thus the center of the dungeon, as long as the players are having *fun*?

After all, the true measure of great DMs is their ability to think fast and sometimes just make it up as they go. The trick is to make the players *want* to go the way you want them to, if you give them an "impossible" puzzle, they won't want to take the time to solve it. However, if you give them an "almost" impossible puzzle with several possible solutions within their characters' abilities, they'll be more likely to stay interested and stay in character.

So Monte, either you got a different article than I did, or I think you're reading way too much into it. You did a fine

job with the new edition, but this game has never really been about the *rules*, it's been about the *roles*.

Tracy, any time you want to start the revolution, brother, I'm there.

Jim "McGyver" Corrigan
Kaukauna, WI

Monte Hail

I'm writing in response to the pair of letters published in *DRAGON* #281, written by Monte Cook and Tracy Hickman.

I have to say that I'm in agreement with Monte on this one. I read Tracy's article and found it entertaining, but I have to say that I'd never want him as a player in a campaign of mine.

First, I'd like to say that I think Tracy sounds like one of the most self-absorbed players I've ever read about. For someone to think that they "saved a game" by going against the kind of game the other players were enjoying playing is ridiculous. Getting your own way at the expense of others is not "acting heroic" at all, it's being a selfish, thoughtless boor. Maybe Tracy was bored by the game at that point, but the other players seemed to have been enjoying mulling over the mystery there. Perhaps the game wasn't what Tracy had in mind, but that doesn't mean it was a bad game. To me, that's like watching a Sherlock Holmes movie, and then griping it wasn't like *Die Hard*.

Second, his advice about walking away if a riddle isn't solved in a short span of time is the most god-awful bit of advice I've ever read. I agree that sometimes DMs get carried away with their riddles, and sometimes it does take a long time to solve them, but the sense of satisfaction when they are solved is a sweet feeling indeed. For him to assume that it is a fault of the DM is also unbelievably self-centered. Maybe the problem isn't with the DM, Tracy, it's with your inability to figure out the clues. Try to spend a little less time griping about no action and more time paying attention to what's going on.

As for DMs "holding the game hostage," what kind of games have you been playing? In our games there is never an adversarial relationship between the players and DM. Everyone is there to have a good time, and all cooperate to do that. This also means agreeing, sometimes, as to who has the final say in how things in the world work. Part of a DM's job is to be a referee, and not to be pushed around into doing whatever players want them to do. A DM is there to create the challenges that players face, and if you, as a player, feel that he is presenting unreal challenges, it should be brought up to him or her *after the game*. Disrupting a game with silly stunts and disruptive acts is juvenile and irritating to most other players.

For some young DMs, the idea of having a "McGyver" player is terrifying. Some novice DMs need to have players who will help bring the most out of them, and help them bring the world that they had envisioned to the players. I used to run a comic/gaming store, and I tried to participate in the games run by some of the kids who were just getting into the hobby. I always tried to get them to realize problems through questions, not through disruptive and "revolutionary" game play. That kind of behavior makes kids regret having put the effort into preparing for the game, and it might make them reach for a game console rather than a book the next time they pick up something to play.

If I had a player pull the kind of crap that Tracy did in his game, he'd have his ass shown to the door. Democracy means majority rule, regardless of whether you got your way or not.

Kevin Madison
Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada

IF YOU FIND IT TOO HARD TO CONVERT YOUR OLD CAMPAIGN, **IT WOULD BE BECAUSE YOU HAVEN'T PUT FORTH ENOUGH THOUGHT OR EFFORT TO DO SO.**

Pros and Cohns

I would like to address the comments made by Mr. Allen Cohn in "Forum" from issue #280. I can understand that someone could be resistant to trying something new; however, once you have made a choice to try something new, you should at least go into it with an open mind. An open mind is apparently something that Mr. Cohn has never had.

The new D&D is in all ways an improvement over previous editions. The changes that were made by Wizards of the Coast not only simplified the game, it also provided players with a lot more options than were previously available. Good examples of this include (but are not even remotely limited to) that there are no longer any race or class level restrictions in the game, you are now able to customize characters so that they can represent your idea of what the character should be, the antiquated THACo system has been replaced with a much more efficient system, a new multiclass system that allows these characters to compete with single class characters at high levels, new character classes were added, prestige classes were introduced, and so on. Apparently some people can't accept change. It is a sad sign that D&D will lose a long-time player over something like making the game simpler and more fun to play. I feel that this new edition rekindled the creativity in my gaming group and I know that anyone else that likes the same creative freedom in their games would feel the same way.

In regards to Mr. Cohn's comments about backward compatibility, it really isn't that hard to modify campaigns from the previous editions into the new edition as your campaign is mostly background information that translates without any conversion rules. If you find it too hard to convert your old campaign, it would be because you haven't put forth enough thought or effort to do so.

Mr. Cohn also said that he would like to see continued support of 2nd edition products to compensate him for his troubles. I think that Wizards of the Coast has already addressed this on their website with their 2nd Edition downloads section. New products should not be made for a discontinued system, as it would be counter-productive and spend too many resources that could be put in to making more products for the current edition.

I think that it was courageous for Wizards of the Coast to make the changes that they did to D&D. It has transformed D&D into a much more enjoyable game with a plethora of options available to those with the imagination and forethought to put them to good use. Cheers to Wizards of the Coast, and thank you for caring enough to update a product that was in need of it for a long, long time.

Michael LeBlanc • Tempe, AZ

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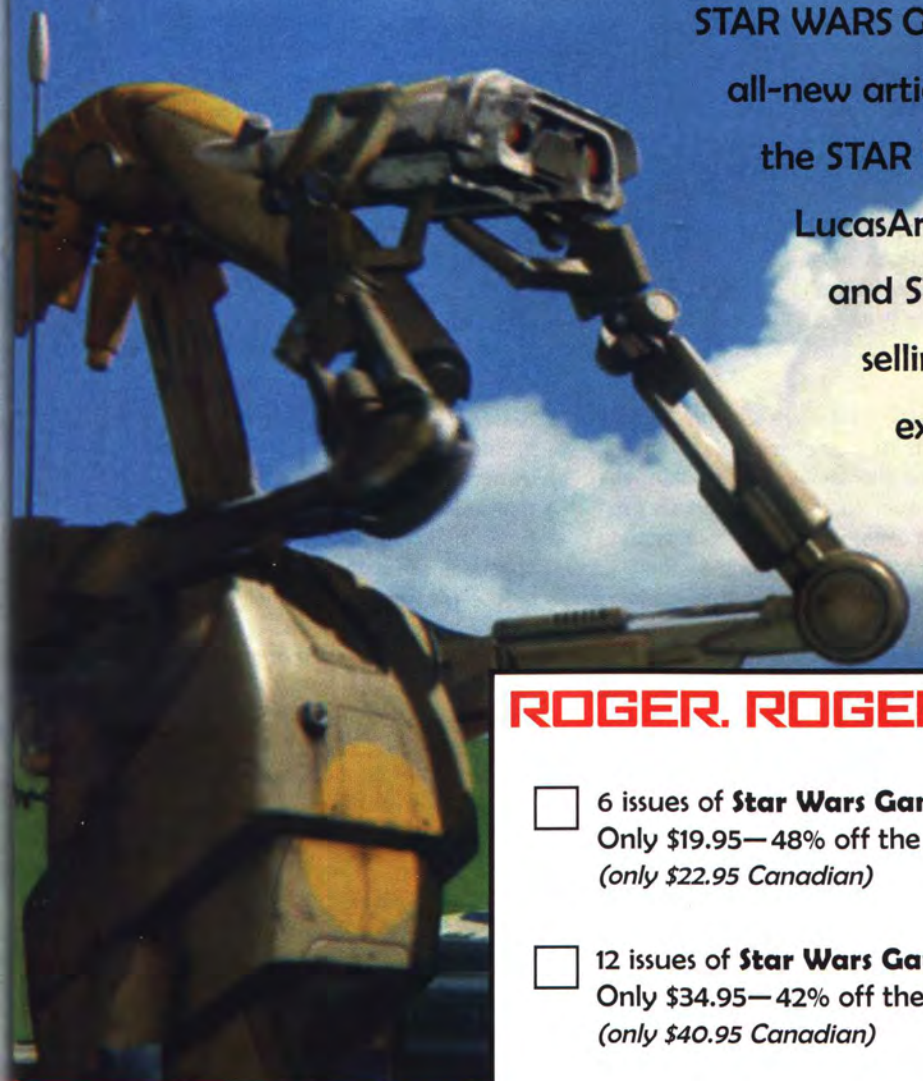

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THE PLAY'S THE THING

OBJECT LESSON

by Robin D. Laws • illustrated by John Kovalic

DM | The young elf maiden seems grateful that you've saved her brother. Make a Wisdom check. (You roll, evidently beating the DC for whatever your DM is testing.) She's pretty shy, but she seems genuinely attracted to you.

YOU | Orstadt tries to remain cool. All his life he's dreamed of marrying a beautiful young elf. He tells her that he has to go down into the Underdark on this dangerous mission, but if he survives, he'll come and visit her again. If that's acceptable to her.

DM | She blushes and tells you she'd like that.

YOU | Orstadt rifles through his pack for a memento to give her until he gets back.

DM | What kind of memento?

One of the best ways to understand people is to look at the objects they surround themselves with. When we're invited over to someone's house for the first time, we tend to look around at their books, pictures, and other possessions to get a sense of their taste and interests.

In a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, your character's possessions can make him seem more real and vivid to you, and can reveal his personality to the DM and other players. When we fill in the equipment column of our character sheets, we tend to think only of the gear the character needs for his adventuring career. While you certainly don't want to forget his weapons, armor, lengths of rope, and so on, it never hurts to add one or two small items he carries around for emotional reasons. You might even find an in-game way to use them to your advantage, as suggested by the example above.

An adventurer's personal mementos are more than mere knick-knacks. Most adventurers travel constantly, living in a succession of inns and encampments. They can't afford the burden of carrying more than a couple of personal items. The few pieces they do choose to carry around with them take on great significance. They remind their owners of the places, people, or ideas that mean the most to them. An adventurer might take comfort from these special possessions in times of danger, or use them as touchstones reminding him of his mission or moral values. So when you select a personal possession for your character, you're choosing a physical representation of the individual he aspires to be.

Reminder of Home

When you're knee-deep in muck, chilled to the bone, or trapped underground among countless monsters who want to eat you, few things provide more reassurance than a reminder of home. These items offer the memory of comfort and safety, and the promise that the adventurer will make it back, if only he keeps his fighting spirit alive. A reminder of home might be:

- pieces of jewelry worked in the distinctive style of your homeland
- a figurine of a national symbol
- a rock, bag of soil, twig or other natural item taken from your home
- an image of a landmark or symbol of your homeland, or of your house

Images for use as traveler's mementos are usually rendered in a medium sturdier than paper or canvas, like enameled metal.

Connection to a Loved One

The most important thing about your character might be his dedication to another person. This loved one might be a parent, spouse, lover, child, mentor, leader, commander, or guru. The object that represents this could be:

- an image of the person
- a piece of the person's clothing or hair
- a letter the person wrote to you
- a gift from this person, which might be anything durable and portable, from a piece of jewelry, to a medal, to a book or scroll containing a text important to both of you

Touchstone of Belief

If your character defines himself primarily by his religious faith, the object he most values will be a holy item of some kind. It might be a standard holy symbol, just like the ones used by clerics as the focus for their magic. You might want to go one step further, however, and specify another sort of devotional item, such as:

- an image of a god or saint, kept tightly sealed in a scroll-case; you pin this up on the wall of any inn you stay at
- a holy book
- prayer beads
- a piece of jewelry bearing a symbol of your faith

Even your utilitarian pieces of gear, from weapons to thieves' tools, might be inscribed with holy calligraphy or designs.

If you're playing a cleric, he definitely owns at least one of these items. You should also pick another type of item to distinguish him from other clerics. Maybe one of your holy symbols also fits into another of the categories given here. Your well-thumbed holy text might have been given to you by a treasured relative or honored superior in your order.

Souvenir of the Past

Your item might remind you of a particular time or incident. Warlike types who have no private lives outside of their time spent adventuring might carry trophies from their favorite kills or choice bits of loot from notable hoards they've plundered. Others might keep awards from their school days or curios purchased during an especially pleasurable trip to an exotic locale.

Symbol of Status

In a quasi-medieval setting, characters of high rank feel no shame in asserting their privileged status. If your character enjoys official rank, he probably feels that it is his responsibility to let others know of his importance. By displaying a symbol of status, he lets his equals know to approach him and gives the lowly their rightful opportunity to grovel before him. Your character's family might display a crest of arms or similar heraldic device. You might wear this on a signet ring or necklace, or paint it on a shield. The colors or patterns of your clothing might indicate your enviable rank. On a more personal level, you might carry with you a map of your ancestral domains or pieces of heirloom-quality jewelry. Status symbols prove handy when you're captured; they tell captors you're worth ransoming. Valuable items can be used to bribe your way out of trouble, so be prepared to bargain with your DM for the right to carry them.

Marker of Taste

Your character might be an aesthete who defines himself by his sense of taste. If this is the case, he is probably a devout collector of art objects and can't resist taking at least one portable item with him. In his spare moments, he gazes fondly at it. Maybe he's risking his life for treasure in order to finance his collection. It's possible that an object of beauty reminds him that there is more to life than the violence and danger that pervades his daily existence.

YOU | Orstadt gives her the copper phoenix pin he bought at the open-air market in Gelravin, and tells her of how alive he felt that day, with the bright sun shining down on him and the flocks of redbirds flying overhead. He tells her he'll come back for it.

DM | She clasps it to her chest, teary-eyed, and promises to keep it safe for you.

YOUNG MAN, CLEAN YOUR ROOM! TAKE OUT THE GARBAGE! DON'T YOU ROLL YOUR EYES AT ME, YOUNG MAN! OH AND PEOPLE WONDER WHY I DRINK...
KOVALIC

"IT'S JUST SOMETHING TO REMIND ME OF HOME..."

SAGE ADVICE

Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

Join the Sage this month for a long look at monsters in the D&D game.

How exactly do attacks work for monsters with two primary attacks, such as a bear? The first attack listed is supposed to be the primary, and the bear's first is 2 claws with a +6 melee bonus. The secondary attack is the bite at a +1 melee bonus. Are the two claw attacks rolled as a single attack at +6, or is it two rolls for the two claws, each at +6? If it's two attacks, then does the bear need to use the full attack action to get both claw attacks? Also, why are both claws at +6, not +6 and +1? Why don't monsters get multiple attacks as characters do?

The basics of monster attacks are explained in the Attacks section of the introduction to the *Monster Manual* (page 7). A bear, or any other creature, has to use the full attack action to get more than one attack in a round (hydras are an exception). A bear has two primary natural weapons: both claws. If the bear uses the full attack action, roll two claw attacks, each at +6, and one bite attack at +1. If both claws were part of a single attack, the attack entry would read "claws +6 melee." The raven in the Animals appendix has such an entry.

Both claws have a +6 attack bonus because both claws are primary weapons. Natural weaponry does not follow the same rules as manufactured weaponry. First, creatures with multiple natural weapons are generally hard-wired to use all of them simultaneously (as opposed to a human, who has no natural weaponry at all and doesn't fight well without special training).

A creature is assigned primary and secondary attacks that reflect its natural ability and fighting style. Consider a giant octopus lashing with all eight tentacles. An octopus doesn't have one primary tentacle and seven "off" tentacles. It does have a secondary attack: a bite. Note that most creatures that have clawed limbs and a bite usually have all their limbs as primary weapons and the bite as a secondary, even when the bite deals more damage. Creatures are usually much more adroit with their claws than their mouths.

Natural weapons don't give creatures multiple attacks for similar reasons. A bear or a lion doesn't make a series of quick nips with its mouth; it chomps down hard and tears. Also, natural weapons aren't as quick or as handy as manufactured weapons, so they can't get a high attack rate. It's not hard to imagine a high-level fighter making multiple swings with a sword in the course of a 6-second melee round, but it would be pretty wild to see a dragon the size of a freight train snapping away like some kind of frenzied, scaly buzzsaw.

In my gaming group, we have come across the slam ability that is used by monsters but have not been able to find in print what exactly a slam is. We assume that it is a attack with enough force that can knock someone down. If that is the case, what is the typical DC of a slam attack?

It's a blunt attack, like a punch or slap (see page 7 in the *Monster Manual*). A slam attack doesn't imply any sort of ability to knock down opponents. If a creature has such an ability, it will be noted in the combat section of the creature's description.

Do piercing weapons cause one-half damage or no damage to skeletons? The *Player's Handbook* indicates the latter (on page 97), but the *Monster Manual* indicates the former, as do some modules.

Skeletons take half damage from piercing or slashing weapons. Later printings of the *Player's Handbook* no longer contain this error.

Since any giant is much larger than a human (from 10 feet to 20 feet taller) and its base speed is higher, when a giant takes a "5-foot step," how far does it move?

It moves 5 feet.

When a creature takes a 5-foot step, it moves 5 feet, regardless of its size or speed; hence, the maneuver's name.

The *Player's Handbook* says the maximum that anyone can be *enlarged* is 50%. Are duergar restricted to this maximum too?

Yes, the duergar's *enlarge* spell-like ability works the same way the spell does.

CORRECTION - "How To Create a Monster"

There's an error in the **Undead** box on page 52 of *Dragon Magazine* issue #276. In the chart for undead Hit Dice, every d8 should be a d12.

POWERPLAY

BY BILL W. BALDWIN

The Well-Armored Rogue
A mithral shirt and a darkwood shield are excellent investments for a rogue. Neither has an armor check penalty, so her skills are unhindered, and together they provide more armor than chainmail. Since the pair's maximum Dexterity bonus is +6, the rogue's Dexterity can go up to 23 without diminishing the armor's and shield's benefits to AC. As both items are relatively inexpensive, a rogue could pick them up before 4th level. Both are considered to be masterwork items, so they can eventually be imbued with magic.

My monk recently got lucky and successfully inflicted a stunning blow on a pesky displacer beast. On my next turn I went into full coup de grace mode on the creature. My DM ruled that even though a coup de grace hits automatically, I still needed to roll to see if I hit the creature because its displacement was still in effect. Was that right?

The DM is always right. Your DM, however, is much more generous than I. First, a stunning attack from a monk leaves the creature stunned for 1 round. By the time it was your turn again, the displacer beast wouldn't have been stunned anymore. Second, stunned creatures aren't helpless; they can't take any actions, and they lose their Dexterity bonus to AC (which makes them subject to sneak attacks), but they are not subject to coup de grace attacks.

Finally, a coup de grace requires a fairly precise hit (that's why it takes a full-round action to do it), so I wouldn't allow a coup de grace against any creature that has concealment or that imposes a miss chance on the attacker, in the same way a rogue can't sneak attack something with concealment.

Your DM was completely right on one count, a live displacer beast is displaced, even if unconscious, otherwise helpless, or stunned.

Would a spell like *magic missile* be subject to the miss chance from a displacer beast? The *magic missile* description says it automatically hits the target.

Miss chances of any kind don't apply to spells that don't require attack rolls (though in most cases you have to see the target to aim the spell at it). A displacer beast gets a +2 resistance bonus to saving throws against any targeted spell (see the Combat section of the displacer beast description), but *magic missile* doesn't allow a save.

At what age do red dragons get their *eyebite* powers? What about their *suggestion* or *discern location* powers? How often can they use the *discern location* power?

All the red dragon's spell-like abilities, and the ages when the dragon gets them, are shown in the table on page 68 of the *Monster Manual*. The dragon gets its *suggestion* power at old age, and it works 3 times a day. The *discern location power* is available at great wyrm age and works once a day. Red dragons don't get the *eyebite* power; the reference to *eyebite* in the text of the red dragon description is an error.

If a dragon casts *enlarge* on itself and grows enough to qualify for the next size category, does it get the damage ratings for that size? What about other dragon powers?

An *enlarge* spell cast on a dragon works like an *enlarge* spell cast on any other creature. The dragon gets a +1 bonus to Strength for every 20% of enlargement. It gets no other benefits from the spell.

The retriever, being a construct, is immune to subdual damage. Its regeneration ability converts all hit point damage it suffers into subdual damage unless the damage is from a blessed or holy weapon. Some have interpreted this to mean that a retriever suffers no damage from any attack that is not made with a blessed or holy weapon. Is this interpretation correct?

The retriever should have fast healing, not regeneration. This change is official errata.

The regenerating celestials (planetar and solar) do not have any text saying what attack forms (if any) inflict normal damage on them. Was this an oversight? If so, what attacks inflict normal damage on them?

Planetars and solars should have fast healing, not regeneration. They can reattach lost limbs. This change is official errata.

The kyton description says that it takes normal damage from fire, acid, and blessed weapons. However, kytons have damage reduction 20/+2. With other regenerating fiends, the weapon has to be of sufficient power to defeat the damage reduction before it can deal normal damage. Should this be the case with the kyton? Also, holy weapons were not mentioned in the kyton's regeneration section; was this an oversight (as holy weapons are mentioned with every other regenerating fiend)?

Any blessed or holy weapon of +2 or better enhancement can deal normal damage to a kyton (as do fire and acid). This change is official errata.

Pit fiends are listed as having damage reduction 25/+2. However, their regeneration section says they take normal damage from blessed or holy weapons of at least +3 enchantment. Usually, the minimum power of a weapon that can defeat the regeneration is the same as that needed to defeat the damage reduction. Is one of these a misprint?

Yes, the pit fiend's damage reduction should be 30/+3. This change is official errata.

Half the damage from a *flame strike* spell comes from divine power. I have seen claims that this damage is holy damage (which would defeat a fiend's regeneration). Is this correct?

No. If the spell inflicted holy damage, the spell description would say so. It inflicts fire damage and "divine" damage that is not subject to protection against fire.

It would not be a bad house rule to say that good clerics deal half holy damage with the spell and that evil clerics deal half unholy damage. Neutral clerics would deal either holy or unholy damage, depending on whether they turn (holy damage) or command (unholy damage) undead.

POWERPLAY

BY BILL W. BALDWIN

Run Like the Wind—Only Faster

A Medium-size barbarian with the Run feat can run 200 feet in 1 round—approximately 23 mph, as fast as the best Olympic sprinter. If the barbarian later becomes lawful and gains levels as a monk, upon reaching 18th level as a monk, he can run 500 feet in a round—over 56 mph! With only a 10 Constitution, this ex-barbarian can cover nearly a mile (5,000 feet) before needing to make a Constitution check.

The introduction to the *Monster Manual* says a creature with the improved grab ability can take a -20 penalty to grappling checks to avoid being treated as grappled and so keep its Dexterity bonus to Armor Class and continue to threaten the area around it, among other benefits. How long does the -20 penalty last? And how long is the creature not considered grappled?

Any creature can opt to take -20 on a grapple check to avoid the more unpleasant aspects of grappling (such as losing your Dexterity bonus and being subject to sneak attacks from rogues), not just creatures with the improved grab ability.

Once you decide to take the -20 penalty, the penalty applies to all grapple checks you make until your next turn. Should you succeed at a grapple check and actually establish a hold on an opponent despite the penalty, you are not considered grappled (if you fail to establish a hold, you wouldn't be grappling in any case, unless someone grabbed and held you). On your next turn, you can stop taking the -20 penalty (which could help you maintain your hold or pin your opponent), but if you do you are considered grappled until it's your turn again, at which point you can either let go or start taking the penalty again.

Exactly how and when does a creature with the improved grab ability deal damage to an opponent? The material at the beginning of the *Monster Manual* doesn't seem to match the material in the various monster descriptions. How does the constrict ability affect a creature's ability to deal damage while grappling?

Improved grab lets you attempt to grapple a foe after you have made a successful melee attack with a natural weapon, usually with either a claw or a tentacle (the creature description says which natural weapon can be used for improved grabs). On the first round of grappling, the grabbing creature inflicts damage normally with a successful melee hit. If the creature then decides to grab and it wins the ensuing grapple check (see page 137 in the *Player's Handbook* for the grappling procedure), it inflicts no extra damage unless it also has the constrict ability. If it can constrict, it inflicts constriction damage when it wins the grapple check.

If the creature begins its turn with an opponent in its grasp, the creature can just hold on or it can attempt another grappling check. If it elects to grapple again and succeeds, the natural weapon the attacker used in the improved grab inflicts normal damage on the opponent. If the attacker also has the constriction ability, it inflicts constriction damage in addition to natural weapon damage.

How does the swallow whole ability work? Can a creature with this ability try to swallow someone immediately after biting? The *Monster Manual* says a swallowed creature can cut its way out with a Tiny or Small slashing weapon. What happens if the creature is large? Can it use a bigger weapon? A short sword is a piercing weapon, but it is a sword. Can you cut your way out with a short sword?

A creature with the swallow whole ability must first grab a foe with its mouth. On the first round it bites and inflicts bite damage, then tries to grab its prey as noted in the answer to the previous question. On the creature's next turn, it can attempt to grapple again. If it succeeds, it inflicts bite damage and swallows the foe.

Being swallowed has various consequences, depending on the creature doing the swallowing, but a swallowed creature is considered grappled, while the creature that did the swallowing is not. A swallowed creature can try to cut its way free with any light piercing or slashing weapon, or it can just try to escape the grapple. If the swallowed creature chooses the latter course, success puts it back in the attacker's mouth, when it can be bitten or swallowed again.

I just noticed that my *Monster Manual* says slain outsiders cannot be raised or resurrected by anything short of a *wish* or *miracle* spell. However, among the various spell descriptions, only the *raise dead* spell has specific prohibitions on which types of creatures it can be used upon. The others (*resurrection, true resurrection*) say the spells can restore life and complete strength to any deceased creature (except that the creature cannot have died of old age). Which of these is correct? For instance, could a 20th-level monk (with the perfect self ability) be *resurrected,* or would a *wish* be necessary?

Constructs, outsiders, and elementals cannot be *raised* or *resurrected* (see the descriptions of creature types in the introduction to the *Monster Manual*). Undead cannot be *raised* (but they can be *resurrected* if they're willing to return to life). The words "any deceased creature" in the *resurrection* and *true resurrection* spell descriptions are incorrect. High-level monks can be *raised* or *resurrected*—they get an exception because they start life as mortals. This is noted in the *Player's Handbook* errata (available on the Wizards of the Coast website) and in the description of the perfect self power on page 40 of the current printing of the book.

The *Monster Manual* entries for cloud giants and storm giants have a curious note under their skills and feats sections. They say that these two kinds of giants have EHD as though they were Large creatures. What does "EHD" mean?

The abbreviation EHD means extra Hit Dice, which affects the number of skills and feats a creature has (see page 11 of the *Monster Manual*).

Would all of the unarmed strikes by a vampiric monk be considered slam attacks and inflict negative levels? Would the vampire monk use its slam damage rating or its monk unarmed damage rating?

Creatures with a level-draining ability drain levels only once per action, so if they manage to get multiple attacks, only the first hit in a series of hits inflicts a negative level. (Note that a hasted creature can inflict a negative level with a hit during its regular action and another negative level with a hit during its extra partial action.)

As "Sage Advice" has pointed out before, creatures with monk levels can combine their natural weapons and their monk unarmed attacks in any way they see fit. For example, the monk could use either its slam damage rating or its monk unarmed damage rating as it chooses. In either case, it can drain energy as noted earlier. If the vampire wishes to use its monk unarmed attack rate, it must use only its monk attack bonus, however.

Say a monster has a challenge rating of 5. How many 5th-level characters should that be a challenge for?

That encounter would be an effective challenge for four 5th-level characters. The definition of challenge ratings is on pages 100 and 101 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*

What would happen if a creature was Large before being turned into a ghoul? Would the large ghoul's claws and bite deal more damage? What about Strength?

Use the rules for increasing a creature's size on page 12 of the *Monster Manual.* Since a standard ghoul is Medium-size, a large ghoul would gain +8 Strength, -2 Dexterity, +4 Constitution (irrelevant in this case because undead have no Constitution scores), and +2 natural armor. The large ghoul also suffers a -1 size penalty to attacks and Armor Class, but because it is a Large (tall) creature, it gains a natural reach of 10 feet.

Why are there no templates for undead other than vampires, ghosts, and liches. What about ghouls, wraiths, and wights?

POWERPLAY

BY BILL W. BALDWIN

"I Love Surprises"

An elf or halfling with 20 Dexterity and the Improved Initiative feat has a +9 to her initiative, making her difficult to catch flat-footed. If this character gets the uncanny dodge ability (as a 2nd-level barbarian or 3rd-level rogue) and the Combat Reflexes feat, she negates all the penalties of being caught flat-footed.

Victims transformed by these creatures lose their old identities (but see the next question) and become standard examples of the creatures that attacked them.

Just how smart (or stupid) are creatures that lack Intelligence scores? Can they open doors, use equipment, or carry things? Can they be bluffed or intimidated?

Intelligence in the D&D game measures a creature's ability to think, learn, and remember. A creature without an Intelligence score can do none of those things. It can't figure out puzzles, learn to do tricks, or remember anything. On the other hand, every creature has a Wisdom and a Charisma score, so it can perceive and react to its surroundings and it knows (though perhaps only on an instinctual level) that it exists.

A living creature without an Intelligence score, such as a monstrous spider, functions as a biological robot programmed to eat, mate, and preserve itself, usually in that order. The spider is competent enough to survive in its normal environment and to fulfill its biological niche as a predator. It is hardwired to hunt, defend its territory, and avoid hazards such as fires, falls, or rushing water. It cannot recognize or deal with anything that its evolution has not prepared it to handle. A spider cannot, for example, figure out how to open a door (though if it sees prey escaping though a door it might push through by dint of sheer strength). Nor can it recognize and attack a party's wizard (though it might show a preference for unarmed or unarmored prey).

Unliving creatures with Intelligence scores are slightly more sophisticated, because they are usually created through some kind of magic, so they come equipped with more programming. A golem, for example, can be assumed to have the sort of basic knowledge that its creator takes for granted, such as the ability to open doors or tell a plate from a bowl. It, too, is competent enough to function in its environment, but in this case, the environment is its creator's.

The spell or ritual that creates a construct or an undead creature also provides the person who cast the spell or performed the ritual the power to command the creature. The creature does not actually understand its orders intellectually, but it responds appropriately to the master's will. A construct or an animated undead can fulfill any of the commands listed for animal companions on page 46 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* except for track (and the creature can even do that if it has the Track feat or the scent ability). In addition, these creatures can be ordered to carry any object they can pick up, as well as follow other short commands such as "march west for two days and attack the first creature you meet."

Non-intelligent undead creatures also retain the barest trace of their former lives. For example, a skeleton ordered to carry a torch will carry it overhead, and if ordered to carry a basin of water or bucket will carry it level so the contents don't spill out. Constructs have a similar ability, based on the creator's knowledge.

Most attempts to Bluff creatures without Intelligence scores are doomed to fail, simply because these creatures have no ability to communicate. You can use a Bluff check to perform a feint against a creature with no Intelligence, but that's about all. Creatures without Intelligence scores are essentially fearless, so they cannot be intimidated. D

ROLE MODELS

FACES

by Mike McVey

Last month's article looked at the techniques and colors used to paint skin tones. This month, we're going to continue on the same theme and take a look at faces. In painting terms, the face is the single most important part of a miniature—it's the focal point. Pick up a miniature and look at it; it's almost a sure bet that your eyes are drawn to the face, just as they are when you look at someone in real life. Last month, we demonstrated that a miniature stands or falls on the way the flesh is painted, and this is doubly true of the face. This is the reason that many painters paint the face last—it brings the miniature to life.

The Basics

Painting faces, as with much of miniature painting, can be as simple or complex as you want to make it. When you first start out, one of the biggest mistakes you can make is to be over ambitious. The best advice to anyone new to the hobby is keep it simple and neat. Never does this apply more than when painting faces. Let's look at a basic example.

Base coat: When painting skin tones on a miniature, most painters tend to start with a fairly deep base color, but with faces you might want to lighten this slightly. You can use a mix of a basic flesh tone with chestnut added to give it a little depth. Make sure that the consistency of the paint you are using isn't too thick or it will fill in the fine detail. You are aiming for an even covering.

Shading: Use a wash for the shading: It's quick and it's good at picking out the sculpted detail. You'll probably need to experiment to get the right color for this—inks are good for washes, as the colors are far deeper and cleaner than paint. Try a mix of chestnut with a little brown added to deepen it and knock off the orange edge. The wash should be thinned slightly with water and applied sparingly to the whole face. You aren't aiming to drown the miniature, so apply just enough to run into the recesses and pick out the detail. If you add too much ink, the excess can be "drawn off" with a clean, dry brush.

Highlighting: Before any highlights are applied, make sure the wash is *completely* dry. When painting faces simply, it's good to use a two stage highlighting technique. The first-stage is to use the base color and paint the raised areas of the face, leaving the deeper areas shaded by the wash. This neatens up the flesh tones and starts to create some depth. The second highlight color is a straight flesh tone, which can be used to pick out the most prominent areas on the face, such as the bridge of the nose, brows, cheekbones, and chin. You can go further than this if you choose, adding more white to the flesh tone and painting it onto progressively smaller areas.

Details: By now the face will look

TIP
Don't be too ambitious at first. Keep your expectations realistic.

TIP
Most miniature painters use progressively lighter tones for flesh.

TIP
Use thinned ink washes for shading.

TIP
Allow your miniature to dry before working on a different area.

TIP
Faces are very challenging. Practice is the best way to get better.

TIP
For more control, experiment with paint and ink consistency.

Finely painted miniatures really stand out in well-crafted landscapes. Realistic settings like this can be constructed using found items or materials from hobby stores.

pretty good, but you still haven't tackled the things that give it character and really bring it to life: the mouth, and especially, the eyes. Let's start with the mouth; what you do with this really depends on how the miniature is sculpted. If the mouth is closed, all you need to worry about is the bottom lip, don't bother with the top lip (unless you want your character to look like he's wearing lipstick). A mix of chestnut with a tiny spot of red works well here; just paint it on the most prominent area. If this doesn't stand out enough, add a line of shading below the lip and in the crack of the mouth. If the mouth is open you'll have a little more work to do. If the tongue is showing, it should be painted the same color as the lip. If teeth are showing, paint the upper and lower teeth with a line of white. Try to pick out individual teeth only if they are sculpted that way; otherwise, you'll get a strange gap-toothed look.

Painting eyes seems to instill more fear into miniature painters than anything else, but it's really not that hard. Here are the two secrets to painting eyes:

1. Always use a good brush. There is no way you'll get good results with a brush that doesn't come to a good, fine point. A 00 pure sable is just about perfect for all fine detail work.

2. Practice. As with most things, practice makes perfect.

There are a few methods for painting eyes, some simple and some complex. Here we're just going to explain the ones that are most commonly applicable. It's kind of the reverse of how you would expect. Try painting the eye black and then add a tiny dot of white at either end. This might sound more complex than painting the white and then dotting in the pupil, but it's far easier to control the shape, and you never get that wide-eyed staring look. In effect you're painting the whole eye and shading around it in one go. Painting the black first also creates more contrasts with the face and makes the eyes stand out more.

The hardest part is getting the eyes even and level on both sides, especially as the nose gets in the way of the left eye (or the right if you're left handed). The best way to get around this is to hold the miniature upside down when painting the left eye. Painting the oval shape of the eye is easier than you might think, as the tip of a fine brush is just about the right shape. The best technique is to hold the brush slightly flat to the front of the model rather than at a right angle as you normally would. That way the shape almost creates itself. Practice on old miniatures until you get the hang of it. When the basic black shape is dry, add tiny dots of white with the tip of the brush; these need to be just inside of either end of the black oval.

When you're painting fine details such as eyes, there are a couple of things to bear in mind: Make sure that the paint is of a consistency so it flows from the tip of the brush freely, and make sure you don't have too much paint on the bristles. If the paint is too thin, or you have too much on the brush, it will flood onto the model. If it is too thick, it won't flow at all.

Framing the Face

To finish making the face stand out from the rest of the miniature you need to add some deep shading all the way around it. This might be around the hairline or between the face and a helmet, if the miniature has one. It's important that you visually separate any areas adjoining the face. Deep brown generally works well for this, but if there is a helmet, try using black. If the miniature has a beard, choose a color that will create contrast with the skin and make the face stand out.

That's really all there is to painting faces! Of course, you can take it much further; it just depends how practiced you are and how much time you are willing to spend. If you want to paint display-quality miniatures, you could easily spend 3 or 4 hours on the face—carefully blending in seven or eight layers of highlighting and three or four stages of blending.

All of the points made in last month's article about choosing tones and colors that reflect who or what the model represents are even more relevant when it comes to the face. All sorts of interesting and evocative effects can be achieved by using different colors. Try adding a little blue under the eyes to give a haggard or sinister look, or a little red blended into the cheeks and nose for a robust appearance. You can add make-up, tattoos, or tribal war paint. Of all the different aspects of miniature painting, the face is one that really warrants extra care and attention. Put a little thought into what you're doing and the time practicing the techniques will be paid back ten-fold. D

DUNGEONCRAFT

GOTTA HAVE FAITH: PART I

by Ray Winninger

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For past installments of "Dungeoncraft," go to http://www.wizards.com/dragon

Three issues ago, "Dungeoncraft" started crafting an entirely new D&D campaign to showcase the new 3rd Edition rules. This time around, **the goal is to build a rough and tumble "lost world" dominated by dinosaurs, volcanoes, and primitive tribes.** So far, a basic overview of the world and a first look at the basic political situation in the campaign's starting area have been developed. Some of the D&D game's races have also been customized to make them more at home in this creation. This month, let's flesh out a few details about the gods, myths, and faiths of the lost world.

The subject of designing gods and faiths for D&D campaigns was first dealt with way back in *Dragon* #258. That installment noted a few reasons why it was particularly important to start thinking about the deities and religions that will dominate your campaign setting as early in the world-building process as possible. In addition, a five-step process for creating a suitable faith from scratch was outlined. Rather than repeat that advice here, go ahead and either dig into your collection of *Dragon* back issues or point your web browser to the "Dungeoncraft" archive online. If possible, you might want to peruse the earlier column right now, before reading further.

Fortunately, almost all of the earlier advice is still sound even in the wake of the new edition. Therefore, we're going to create the gods of the lost world by stepping through the same five-step process used last time, while selecting some different options on this go-round. This is also a good opportunity to demonstrate a technique or two for tweaking the D&D game rules to help lend your campaign its own flavor.

Step One: Polytheism vs. Monotheism

Just in case you don't have your dictionary handy, "polytheistic" faiths believe in a multitude of interrelated gods, while their "monotheistic" counterparts believe in a single supreme deity. Since most D&D game worlds feature polytheistic religions, a monotheistic faith was incorporated into the last campaign just to be different. On that world, the only true god was Aris, the living consciousness of the planet itself. This time, in the interest of variety, we'll design a polytheistic faith. The next step, therefore, is to figure out roughly how many gods are necessary and how they are interconnected.

On most D&D worlds, the gods are organized into pantheons that give each god complete dominion over one particular realm. In other words, there might be a god of the sea, a god of the sun, a god of poetry, a god of war, and so forth. Similarly, **most D&D campaigns are built around gods who walk in human form and manifest larger-than-life human personality traits.**

Because this is our second time around the block, let's avoid these D&D conventions when possible in the hope of creating something a bit more ambitious. The idea of all-powerful gods lording over the lost world just doesn't seem right. One of the campaign's major themes is that savagery is everywhere and survival is difficult. If possible, this theme should be reflected in the gods created for the world. Deities should find life every bit as rough as their mortal subjects. Also, since the dinosaurs are the real "stars" of this world and represent its major differentiating feature, there should be a way to reflect them in the gods as well.

It makes a certain amount of sense to turn some of the dinosaurs themselves into gods. As it's been presented thus far, the lost world is the ultimate venue for Darwin's concept of the survival of the fittest. What if the very oldest and fittest survivors acquire a reverence from Mother Nature and their fellow creatures that is akin to a spiritual aura? In other words, **somewhere off in the forest is a tyrannosaurus rex that is so old, so large, and so fearsome that it has become a sort of god.** All the other inhabitants of the lost world immediately recognize the halo of power that surrounds this creature, and even the planet itself seems to shake with fear when it passes. The mysterious energies that emanate from the tyrannosaurus rex somehow stem from its long history—all the battles it has won, the years it has seen, and the other creatures it has subjugated. These

forces are so powerful that some of the world's humans, humanoids, and lizardfolk cultists who revere these beasts are capable of tapping into the energy themselves to manipulate the natural world (that is, through divine spells).

This concept is appealing for a number of reasons: Not only does it meet all the goals and establish that the lost world is quite unlike the standard D&D setting, it also has the advantage of providing some interesting springboards for potential adventures. **Although they should be rarely seen, the fact that the gods walk the earth alongside the player characters is appealing.** The idea that the PCs might one day confront a god also provides some interesting adventure ideas. It's not clear exactly how or why this would happen just yet, but it sounds heroic and interesting.

This idea also fits well with the various concepts already created. The Solaani (elves) enjoy a special bond with pterosaurs, for instance. Undoubtedly they worship some sort of enormous pterosaur who has become one of these gods. Similarly, it's already been established that the tyrannosaurs possess some mysterious form of group intelligence and have actually hatched a scheme that has torn the Bruun, one of the human tribes, in half (see last issue). It looks like the great tyrannosaurus rex god is the source of that strange intelligence.

Of course, this concept does have one drawback: The gods usually suggest a few interesting details about the campaign setting: How was the world formed? What is the nature of good and evil? That most of them will have fascinating histories of their own is an easy assumption to make, but these gods are really little more than glorified animals. They didn't create their world; it created them. Most of the central mysteries still remain.

To solve this problem, a second set of even older gods can be created who are now extinct. These elder beings were much closer to human in composition and attitude, and it was their power that created the lost world. This second pantheon consisted of two arch-gods: one representing light and symbolized by the sun, the other representing darkness and symbolized by a moon. Each of these elder beings was totally consumed by a hatred for his rival and the pair of them spent the whole of their very long lives battling each other. **In fact, they created the lost world to serve as their battleground, standing as it does at the midway point between the sun and the moon.** Over time, the lost world itself gave birth to the various creatures who came to dominate it, including the various dinosaur gods and the lizardfolk who built a civilization and a faith to celebrate them.

One day, the god of darkness finally struck a blow that was powerful enough to shatter the god of light into countless little fragments, each of which was an individual living being. These fragments became the Solaani (elves), the first mammalian inhabitants of the lost world. Over time, the Inuundi (dwarves) and the humans gradually evolved from the Solaani. Although these newly formed savages didn't realize their divine origins for many generations, most of them did manifest a natural aversion to darkness almost immediately, explaining perhaps why most of the humanoid inhabitants of the lost world favor non-evil alignments.

Once he destroyed his brother, the god of darkness was faced with a dilemma. His entire existence was defined by his hatred for his rival, and if the great battle was to come to an end, his life would have no more meaning. For about a century he tried to figure out how to continue the struggle against his hated enemy before he finally noticed the Solaani and resolved to destroy them. **Since there was no effective way to battle so many Solaani in his singular form, he traveled back to the lost world and let the great tyrannosaur god and its followers devour him.** That way, the beasts and their followers among the lizardfolk would absorb his essence and his hatred, driving them to hound and hunt the Solaani and their descendants. The tyrannosaurs' plot against the Bruun is probably a direct manifestation of the darkness god's evil influence.

Before going further, it's worth deciding how much of this backstory is generally known to the world's inhabitants. While it's safe to assume that the denizens of the lost world are aware of the role the gods of light and darkness played in the creation of their world, only a few truly enlightened individuals should understand the elder gods' final fates. The idea of keeping the true origin of the Solaani a secret, as well as the fact that the spirit of the darkness god lives on in the tyrannosaurs is likewise appealing. This leaves a couple of big mysteries for the players to uncover and neatly takes care of the obligation to the Second Rule of Dungeoncraft: Most of the world believes that the old gods simply perished in one last cataclysmic battle.

Speaking of big secrets, this latest bit of backstory has provided some inspiration that allows the opportunity to plug an earlier hole. As you might recall from the last couple of installments, the Solaani were somehow responsible for the downfall of the lizardfolk, and this triumph is slowly leading to the end of their civilization. It was never established, though, just how the Solaani accomplished their victory. Now that the elves' true origins are set down, what if the elves are secretly "reconstructing" the god of light? Since the elves are fragments of the elder god, several of them somehow reunited themselves to form a lesser version of the long-dead god. It was this measure that was finally necessary to defeat the lizardfolk, and it was this move that is slowly making the Solaani extinct. The reconstruction was accomplished through some sort of powerful magic spell, and a side effect of that spell is that the life essences of more and more Solaani are being drawn to the proto-god and rejoined over time. This phenomenon manifests itself as a strange plague contracted by the elves. The victims of this plague aren't really dying, though; **their souls are simply being absorbed back into the god of light.** Eventually, the god might be entirely reassembled.

All of this might also explain the strange plot of the tyrannosaur god and its followers. Perhaps the god of darkness knows what is happening and is influencing the dinosaurs to snuff out his newly reborn foe and destroy the

ALTHOUGH THEY SHOULD BE RARELY SEEN, THE FACT THAT THE GODS WALK THE EARTH ALONGSIDE THE PLAYER CHARACTERS IS APPEALING.

NAME	TYPE	"PERSONALITY"	ASPECTS OF NATURE
Kor	Tyrannosaur	vicious, predatory, regal	the hunt, death
Abrexis	Pterosaur	wise, inquisitive, free	skies, wind
Haali	Plesiosaur	vain, tempestuous	seas, storms
Kalaar	Ultrasaur	serene, matronly	the land, family

Solaani before the god of light can grow any more powerful.

These ideas are useful because they should provide lots of interesting ideas for adventures. A Solaani PC might contract the plague, the characters might find and confront the newly reformed god of light, they might get caught up in the plot of the tyrannosaur god, and so on. For maximum effect, this should be a secret for some time (as per the Second Rule). Only the very highest level elves understand the true nature of the plague that is slowly wiping out their civilization.

Step Two: The Nature of the Gods

Now that the pantheon of the lost world has been sketched out, it's time to consider their basic natures. Fortunately, most of the information has already been created. But since the dinosaur gods are going to have the biggest impact upon the game world for the foreseeable future, it's necessary to flesh them out just a tad more. **How many of these gods exist, what are their spheres of influence, and how do they conduct themselves?**

Although it's obviously an arbitrary decision, four dinosaur gods seems just about right. That provides enough gods for variety, but not so many that a lot of early effort is expended creating them. Fortunately, this decision isn't restrictive—with the way the structure is set up, it will be easy enough to add more gods later should the need arise.

As indicated earlier, one of the dinosaur gods is a tyrannosaur and another is a pterosaur. This leaves two slots to fill. One obvious choice is some sort of sea creature, perhaps a giant plesiosaur (something akin to the Loch Ness monster for those of you who are dino-challenged). A second good choice might be an ultrasaur (a classic bulky plant eater with a long neck and tail). Although the ultrasaur is not really sentient, it's necessary to assign a "personality" trait or two to each of the gods to help differentiate them from each other. Each god should also possess a mystical bond with certain aspects of nature. Finally, each god should get a name. "Tyrannosaur god" is getting old.

For maximum effect, the dinosaur gods should rarely show themselves. They spend most of their time hidden away in valleys and grottos unknown to the lost world's sentient inhabitants. When they do appear, they are always accompanied by a hefty retinue of lesser dinosaurs who serve as their followers. Although most of **the dinosaur gods are generally disinterested in the affairs of the world around them** (Kor being the obvious exception), they do occasionally use their considerable influences to defend their territories or aid the cults of worshippers who have sprung up to honor them. For now, these are probably the only important factors to worry about.

Next month, we'll translate this bizarre mythology into D&D terms and offer some tips on how to customize the game rules to lend your clerics a little extra flavor.

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DORK TOWER

By John Kovalic

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THE UNSPEAKABLE OAF by John Kovalic

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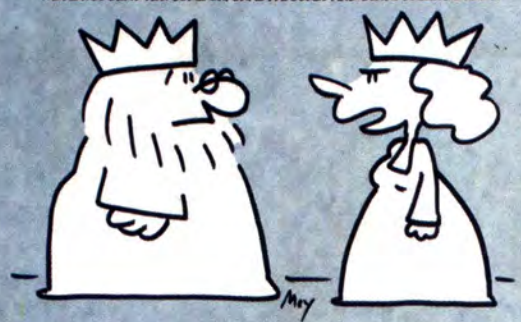
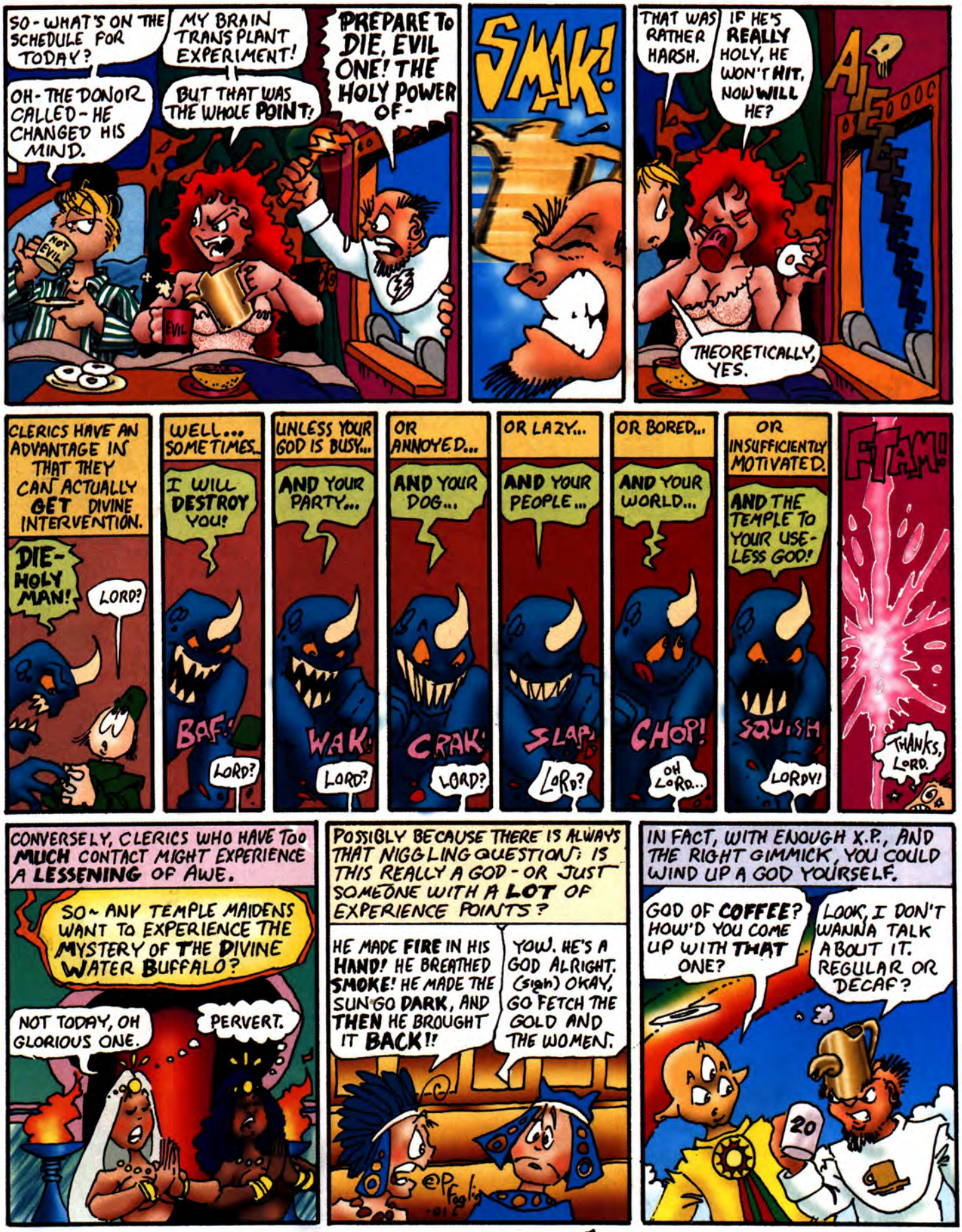
"WE'RE NOT BEAT YET! COME ON, GRAB A BUCKET AND START BAILING BUDDY!"



"You never needed glasses before Lady Godiva came along!"

WHAT'S NEW WITH PHIL AND DIXIE


SO - WHAT'S ON THE SCHEDULE FOR TODAY?
OH - THE DONOR CALLED - HE CHANGED HIS MIND.
MY BRAIN TRANSPLANT EXPERIMENT!
BUT THAT WAS THE WHOLE POINT!
PREPARE TO DIE, EVIL ONE! THE HOLY POWER OF -
NOT EVIL
EVIL
SMAK!
THAT WAS RATHER HARSH.
IF HE'S REALLY HOLY, HE WON'T HIT. NOW WILL HE?
AIEEEEEEEEEE
THEORETICALLY, YES.
CLERICS HAVE AN ADVANTAGE IN THAT THEY CAN ACTUALLY GET DIVINE INTERVENTION.
DIE-HOLY MAN!
LORD?
WELL... SOMETIMES...
I WILL DESTROY YOU!
BAF!
LORD?
UNLESS YOUR GOD IS BUSY...
AND YOUR PARTY...
WAK!
LORD?
OR ANNOYED...
AND YOUR DOG...
CRAK!
LORD?
OR LAZY...
AND YOUR PEOPLE...
SLAP!
LORD?
OR BORED...
AND YOUR WORLD...
CHOP!
OH LORD...
OR INSUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATED.
AND THE TEMPLE TO YOUR USE-LESS GOD!
SQUISH
LORDY!
FTAM!
THANKS, LORD.
CONVERSELY, CLERICS WHO HAVE TOO MUCH CONTACT MIGHT EXPERIENCE A LESSENING OF AWE.
SO - ANY TEMPLE MAIDENS WANT TO EXPERIENCE THE MYSTERY OF THE DIVINE WATER BUFFALO?
NOT TODAY, OH GLORIOUS ONE.
PERVERT.
POSSIBLY BECAUSE THERE IS ALWAYS THAT NIGGLING QUESTION: IS THIS REALLY A GOD - OR JUST SOMEONE WITH A LOT OF EXPERIENCE POINTS?
HE MADE FIRE IN HIS HAND! HE BREATHED SMOKE! HE MADE THE SUN GO DARK, AND THEN HE BROUGHT IT BACK!!
YOW. HE'S A GOD ALRIGHT. (sigh) OKAY, GO FETCH THE GOLD AND THE WOMEN.
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IN FACT, WITH ENOUGH X.P., AND THE RIGHT GIMMICK, YOU COULD WIND UP A GOD YOURSELF.
GOD OF COFFEE? HOW'D YOU COME UP WITH THAT ONE?
LOOK, I DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT IT. REGULAR OR DECAF?
20
END!
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